THE POOR IN GREGORY OF TOURS

A Study of the Attitude of Merovingian Society Towards the Poor, as Reflected in the Literature of the Time

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Philosophy, Columbia University

New York, 1936

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PREFACE

The attitude of society towards the various aspects of life and of human relationships determines, largely, the general characteristics of an epoch. In fact, it is by these very attitudes, from the psychological point of view, that one epoch differs from another.

Through the teachings of its founders, Christianity succeeded in rehabilitating the poor and the humble and in raising them to a high place in a society where, however, the acquisition of material wealth and of temporal power remained the chief ambition of man. Christian ideals, possible of realization in a small, restricted group could hardly fail to encounter serious resistance in a realistic world, even after Christianity had become the religion of the Roman Empire. How was it possible that these two mutually opposing forces, namely, the idealistic force of Christianity on the one hand and the realistic force of the world on the other, could accommodate themselves to existence side by side with each other?

We know that it was during the Merovingian period that the theories and ideals of Christianity were definitely absorbed by and became an integral part of the French people. In what manner and to what extent, in so far as the prestige of the poor man enters into the point in question, could this task of social psychology be accomplished? It is in search of the answer to this problem that this present study has been undertaken.

Here, as in the case with many other events and aspects of the social evolution of the human race, that which was accomplished in the Merovingian period was the result of long and slow development.

The difficulty with which we are confronted is just how to discover what was taking place in the minds of people at a period so far distant and one for which there is such a great lack of personal documents to which we may have access. In this desert, the rich and intense personality of the bishop of Tours appears like an oasis.

Georgius Florentius, as Gregory of Tours was baptized, came of a long line of bishops and other pious Christian ancestors. As he tells us himself, of the bishops who had occupied the see of Tours before him, all but five were of his family.[1] He was consecrated bishop of Tours at the age of thirty-three, in the year 573, during the reign of King Sigibert and Queen Brunhildis. The see of Tours was, however, shortly afterwards plunged into the midst of a long period of violence and intrigue by the murder of King Sigibert and

this struggle, in which the two famous queens Brunhildis and Fredegundis played the principal rôles, and only ended with the murder of Brunhildis in 613, was to tax the courage and statesmanship of Gregory to the utmost. He died in the year 594.

The high social and official position of Gregory of Tours as a member of the aristocratic senatorial class as well as the spiritual head of an important diocese, gave him rare opportunity to observe and even to have a hand in many of the leading events of his time. He was the intimate associate of royalty and his official duties took him on many journeys through the kingdom of the Franks, opportunities for observation of which he did not fail to take good advantage.

While Gregory does not enter into descriptions of persons nor of places, yet his lively and vivid accounts of the period through which he lived, coupled with his accounts of legends and traditions of events prior to his time, given in minute and careful detail, furnish us with what is, with lives of the saints and the various legal documents, practically our sole source of information about the life and customs of Merovingian Gaul. Certainly the Salic law, which has been called "our most valuable documentary source of knowledge" for this Merovingian period,[2] could not have supplied us with the glimpses of life such as have been given us in the *Historia Francorum*. It is even to the pages of the *Historia* that we owe our possession of the famous Pact of Andelot, made between the kings of Burgundy and Austrasia in the year 587.[3]

It is indeed fortunate for us that Gregory of Tours, endowed with these special advantages, was a keen and sympathetic observer and felt impelled to record his impressions and experiences. While strict impartiality cannot be claimed for him when it is a question of friends or enemies of the Church, yet the personal feeling which he at times injects into his accounts of events is often responsible for their vividness and interest to us.

It is this personal element especially that distinguishes the work of the bishop of Tours from the accounts of the same period contained in the *Chronicles* of Fredegarius, composed during the seventh century and also in the *Liber Historiae Francorum,* composed anonymously in the eighth century, and makes of it an actual reflection of the psychology of the epoch during which Gregory lived and of which he wrote.

Gregory's writings comprise, according to his own account given in the last chapter of the *Historia Francorum,* the following: ten books of history, seven of miracles, one about the lives of the Fathers, one book of commentaries on the Psalms and one on the offices of the Church.[4] All of these works are in existence today,

with the exception of the commentary on the Psalms, of which we possess only the preface and the titles of the chapters.[5]

An exhaustive summary of the various editions and translations of the *Historia Francorum* has been made by O. M. Dalton in the introductory volume to his translation. Here recognition is given to the work of Pertz, G. Monod, W. Arndt and M. Bonnet in classifying and tabulating the various MSS. of the *Historia*.

Among the printed editions may be mentioned that of Dom Ruinart, Benedictine of S. Maur, published in Dom Martin Bouquet's *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France,* Paris, 1739, which is also the basis of the text published by J. Gaudet and N. R. Taranne, Paris, 1836-38; also that of W. Arndt and B. Krusch in *Monumenta Germaniae Historia, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum,* volume I, Hanover, 1885, is deserving of special mention.

The author wishes to take this opportunity to acknowledge an inestimable debt of gratitude to Professor Henri F. Muller of Columbia University. Not only was the inspiration for the present study found in Professor Muller's stimulating courses but his patient and careful criticism of the manuscript, given generously and unstintingly throughout its entire preparation, has made possible the completion of the work.

The helpful criticism of other members of the Department of French at Columbia University is likewise gratefully acknowledged, in particular that of Professor John L. Gerig, Professor Louis Cons, Professor Arthur Livingston, and Dr. C. Sprietsma.

INTRODUCTION

As is shown by the history of Christianity, its spirit represented the exact antithesis of the spirit of the pagan world. It exalted humility, poverty and ugliness as opposed to pride, riches and physical beauty sought by pagan society. To the gaiety of the pagan peoples, Christianity opposed extreme sobriety. This spirit is illustrated in the pictures of the period representing Christ. In none of them do we find even a smile.[1] To become a Christian, for the rich, usually meant giving away one's wealth and becoming poor in worldly goods or, at least, it meant caring for the poor as generously as one's means would allow. Society was conceived of as a brotherhood in which worldly ends had no place.

This spirit was carried over into the early Christian society in Rome where the new religion, patronized largely by slaves, existed for some time unnoticed by the authorities. However, as Christianity gained in the number of its followers and gradually began to attract the attention of the upper classes and to make converts among these latter, the character of its leaders changed. By the fourth century the bishops had become persons of great power and influence and, consequently, this office was now sought by members of the leading families. In the early days, the bishops had been as poor and as ignorant as any of their followers but, with the acquisition of temporal power, their office became a coveted one.

In order to attract the upper classes as well as the masses to their cult, it became necessary to make certain concessions to the pagan tastes of their prospective converts. Remembering that these were often descended from parents who still celebrated the pagan rites and followed the pagan customs, the Church did not seek to surround them with complete austerity. Rich temples were erected and great pomp and splendor were introduced into the new religion. The pagan converts found the Christian basilicas and baptistries perfumed with incense, lighted with many candles, and decorated with rich hangings, a method which, according to a comment made by LeBlant, often proved more efficacious in instilling faith than prolonged instruction.[2]

The force of this love of beauty and luxury on the part of the public and the respect which the people as a whole still entertained for worldly circumstance is illustrated by Sulpicius Severus' account of the election of Saint Martin as bishop of Tours. It had become customary for the person of the bishop to be much more prepossessing than was that of Saint Martin, with his soiled clothing and

disordered hair, and this lack of imposing appearance came very near losing for Saint Martin the office of bishop of Tours or, rather, losing for the church at Tours the benefits of having Saint Martin for its bishop.[3]

By the sixth century, the office of bishop had become of great importance and the holders thereof exercised a very large influence, both in religious and in temporal affairs. The pagan cults had long since been largely suppressed and had been supplanted by Christianity, although this work of Christianization had to be actively continued even during the seventh century. In general, everyone, the rulers and subjects alike, was now under the domination of the Christian Church. The care of the indigent classes had become a well-organized branch of the Church's activity and the bishops stood as the recognized protectors of all oppressed.

However, the practice of charity towards the indigent was by no means an innovation of the Christian religion. An examination of some of the earliest records to which we have access[4] reveals the fact that even the primitive pastoral peoples had their indigent element and made provision for caring for it. This fact is brought out in an interesting study of the history of charity as practiced by the various peoples from ancient to modern times, together with the motives therefor, by Léon Lallemand and entitled *Histoire de la Charité*.[5] Here the author calls attention to the fact that many laws, more or less carefully observed in fact as well as in spirit, have been included in the codes of the various nations but in very few cases was this legislation enacted for disinterested reasons. We find that the Greek city-states provided for their indigent class because it was for the good of the state, which with them was of paramount importance.[6] In Rome, the poor had certain privileges such as free public baths and associations for defraying funeral expenses.[7] There was a city physician who was paid out of the city treasury, corn and wine were distributed,[8] public amusements and banquets were given, and special support was provided for the children of the poor as well as for the helpless aged.[9]

With the triumph of Christianity, there was introduced for charity a new motivation, the doctrine of the brotherhood of man and the mutual responsibility of man for his fellow beings. This attitude brought with it a greater tolerance for the lower classes, a tolerance which, by the sixth century, had grown to be a real weapon in the hands of the official sponsor and protector of the poor, the Christian Church.

Thus the poor apparently had been progressively gaining in prestige as a class for several centuries. In the fourth century, we have the triumph of Christianity and its doctrines over paganism.

In the fifth century, probably superinduced by the barbarian invasions, there was evidenced on the part even of the aristocracy an extreme disinterestedness in all worldly things. Many people withdrew into monasteries, the number of clerics increased, the military power weakened, the important families no longer sought to perpetuate themselves through marriage and children. All worldly glory became as nothing in the face of the overwhelming desire to gain paradise in the after life.[10] In the sixth century we find the culmination or the flowering of this social and psychological evolution of the poor in its most complete manifestation.

In the epic literature of a later period, however, the poor have apparently become so negligible an element as scarcely to merit mention[11] and, with the appearance of the "roman cortois" or courtly literature of a century or so later, we see the poor man evolved as the type of "vilain" and represented as being possessed of every undesirable and even disgusting attribute.[12] The hatred and contempt felt toward the "vilain" is well illustrated in the twelfth century poem of Bertrand de Born against those of that class that were becoming rich. They appear here as sly, stingy, filled with pride and knowing nothing of moderation. The poem ends with the poet calling upon God to curse them.[13] Nevertheless, it must be recognized that even in this predominantly aristocratic society the poor man had his place, as is attested, for example, by the Roman de Renard, the bourgeois literature, and the *fabliaux,* or popular literature of the time.

Exhaustive studies[14] have been made on the question of the position of the "vilain" in the epic and courtly literature which make it unnecessary to insist further upon this point here.

As for the Merovingians, much has been written concerning them and the society of their time, especially concerning the influence which the Christian Church exerted upon this society. The work of Marignan in his *Études sur la civilisation française* deserves particular mention in this regard, as does that of Prou, *La Gaule mérovingienne.* Yet the question of the rehabilitation of the poor as a psychological phenomenon accomplished by the Church during the sixth century has thus far been neglected.

Therefore, it is proposed in the present study to attempt to determine by what process this high standing of the poor, which was inherent in the doctrines of Christianity as well as in those of other Oriental religions, became a real social force in the civil society of sixth century Gaul.

CHAPTER I

THE POOR WERE AN IMPORTANT CLASS IN THE EYES OF THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRISTIANITY

Just as the practice of charity had existed prior to the Christian era, so also were there other agencies which preached the doctrine of the dignity of the poor and respect for them. Long before the new religion made its appearance in Gaul, the poor comprised an important class in other Oriental religions which had found their way into the Occident. In fact, it was to this stratum of society that these early Oriental cults first made their appeal.

One of these cults which not only helped pave the way for Christianity in the West but which also closely resembled it in many of its teachings, notably that of respect for the poor, was the Mysteries of Mithras. An Indo-Iranian cult, the worship of Mithras was first introduced into Rome about the year 67 B. C. by Cilician pirates but did not arouse much comment until the first century of the Christian era, at which time it began enjoying a certain notoriety.[1]

The army was one of its chief instruments of propagation, since troops levied in the Orient were scattered all over the Empire and, wherever they went, they took their religion with them. Merchants travelling through the Empire, as well as large numbers of expatriated captives, also carried this Eastern cult into the West.[2]

As was the case later with Christianity, Mithraism rose finally from a religion of the lower classes to the favorite cult of the aristocracy, and even of the emperors, though its first incursions were made among the lower classes and, for a long time, it remained the religion of the humble.[3] Its congregations recognized no social distinctions. In the Church all were equals. It made its appeal to the highest of human aspirations, the hope in immortality and the belief in a final justice,[4] aspirations of a people who, oppressed in this life, seek their consolation in the hope of another.

Referring to the extensive influence of the Mysteries of Mithras, Renan said: "Si le christianisme eût été arrêté dans sa croissance par quelque maladie mortelle, le monde eût été mitriaste."[5]

It may be said, therefore, that the poor as a class enjoyed considerable importance at that period and that Christianity, preaching much the same doctrines in this respect, found its way largely paved by these earlier Eastern cults.

As for Christianity, before the promulgation of the Edict of Milan in 313, by which it received from Constantine the impetus and the sanction which were to carry it to complete ascendency in the fourth century, its adherents were few. Groups of poor people huddled together in the same quarter of cities, people who had received their religion from foreigners, carried on their worship more or less unnoticed by the upper classes.[6] In Rome itself at the beginning of the fourth century, there were not more than thirty-five thousand Christians, most of whom were recruited from the lower classes.[7] It must be recognized, however, in passing that it was not only from the lower classes that these early Christian congregations were formed. Members of the Roman aristocracy in particular were occasionally numbered among them.[8]

Gregory of Tours, in the *Historia Francorum,* knew the part which these poor congregations sometimes played in the establishing of the early Church in Gaul and also their importance in its development. The following anecdote, taken from the *Historia,* will serve to illustrate this fact.

Under the emperor Decius, in the middle of the third century, there had been great persecution of Christians in Gaul. One of the disciples of these early martyrs went to the city of Bourges to found a church, but it was only among the poor of the city that he was able to make converts. The rich remained faithful to their idolatrous cults. These poor converts were desirous of providing for themselves a place of worship but they had no money with which to build a church. In their need, they addressed themselves to a certain Leocadius, a senator, and obtained from him a house which they were permitted to use as a church and for which he took from them only a small, nominal sum. Leocadius not only provided for them a place of worship but he himself became a convert to Christianity. Thus was founded by these poor people the first Christian church in the city of Bourges and also through them the support of a member of the ruling class was secured for the new religion.[9]

It seems that here Gregory of Tours has preserved the memory of a tradition of the early Church which very likely conforms to facts.

In the early days of Christianity in Gaul, the poor and the oppressed did not look for any material or practical help from the new religion. The consolation which they received was rather from the sympathy of their fellow sufferers. The bishops lived and worked very close to their little flock of converts, but were entirely without the temporal power which they later received as a result of the adoption of their religion by the ruling class.[10]

After the conversion of the emperor Constantine and the consequent promulgation of the Edict of Milan in 313, the bishops had at their command not only power but also money. With this newly acquired wealth, they dispensed charity with a liberal hand.[11] Each church kept its register of those dependent upon it.[12]

At the time of the barbarian invasions in the fifth century, the bishops showed themselves tireless in their efforts and sacrifices to alleviate the sufferings of the populace[13] and, even after this crisis had been passed, they did not cease to care for the needy. As a matter of fact, the care of the poor was, in great part, the justification for their owning property and for their wishing to keep it intact for that use.

However, in spite of this widespread and well organized charity, there still persisted at this time an aristocratic and pagan disdain for poverty. As has been pointed out, charity towards the indigent classes was by no means an innovation of the Christian religion although Christianity, in rehabilitating the poor, did bring to it a new motivation, a new element. The difference between charity as practiced at Rome and that preached by Christianity has been aptly expressed by one writer by pointing out the fact that at Rome, alms was a right possessed by everybody but a duty of no one, whereas according to the Christian ideal, it was nobody's right but everybody's duty.[14] The germs of this conception of charity are, of course, to be found in the Gospels and its development throughout the early centuries of the Christian era represents a long process of evolution. It did not reach its full social and psychological development until the sixth century when, as evidenced by the writings of Gregory of Tours, it attained great importance, as we shall attempt to show.

Before entering upon this discussion however, in order to contrast the sixth century attitude with the previous one, a brief examination of the period immediately preceding, that is, of the fifth century, should prove useful. For this purpose, the *Letters* of Sidonius Apollinaris, the most outstanding figure of the fifth century, a man who combined the ancient Roman culture and education with the new Christian ideals, who, at different periods of his life, held both political and ecclesiastical office, are our chief source of information.

Born an aristocrat and a member of the senatorial order, Sidonius was not only conscious of this heritage but proud of it. "Sidoine Apollinaire," has said one of his commentators, "n'a plus du paganisme ni la croyance ni le nom; mais il en a l'éducation et les habitudes d'esprit." [15] It is this aristocratic pride in his birth

that has caused him to be condemned as disdaining the humbler classes of society.[16]

When he has occasion to mention the outstanding attributes of any of his friends and associates, the qualities which he finds commendable are those sought by an aristocratic society and one in which literary culture held a high place. Refinement of manners and moderation,[17] the reliance upon personal charm rather than upon mere ostentatious display of wealth[18] in the securing of honors are highly praised by Sidonius but of all worldly honors and distinctions, none can compare with that of being a poet. He voices this opinion in a letter addressed to his friend Syagrius.[19] Here is indeed a concrete illustration of the truth of the contention that after all Sidonius was a product of the pagan education and attitude of mind, referred to above.

The persistence of worldly ambition even in the leaders of the Church in the fifth century is exemplified in a letter which Sidonius wrote to his wife, after his elevation to the bishopric. Here he expresses the hope that their children will emulate their ancestors in elevating the family to even higher rank, that of consuls, just as he himself had been able to elevate them from prefectorian to patrician rank.[20]

The importance of the Roman ideal of literary culture as the worthiest of human ambitions in Sidonius' society is also shown in several letters wherein he exhorts his friends to cease occupying themselves with their country estates and neglecting their friends and their literary pursuits. He gives expression to the contempt felt for those who did not share in this culture by reproaching one friend for burying himself among "cowkeeping rustics and grunting swineherds," and asks him whether it is not as much the duty of a man of aristocratic descent to cultivate himself, as to cultivate his estate.[21] Another friend is congratulated upon the assiduity with which he is pursuing his studies and told that the educated man is as far above the boor as the boor is above the beast.[22] As this letter was written about the year 477,[23] a long time after Sidonius' consecration as bishop, it is evident that his new life as an ecclesiastic did not alter all at once his old pagan ideals of what constituted real success.

The persistence in the fifth century of the old pagan ideals of beauty and materialism appears even in the attitude towards the churches themselves. For example, in a letter written about 470, Sidonius repeats for the benefit of his correspondent the inscription which he had composed for a new church, recently built at Lyons under the supervision of Bishop Patiens. It is significant that in this lengthy inscription, which consists largely of a description of the

church building, there is no reference to the use to which the building was to be put nor to anything of which it was supposed to be symbolical.[24]

A similar omission is even more remarkable in the inscription which Sidonius composed for the walls of the new basilica of Saint Martin of Tours, which had just been rebuilt by Bishop Perpetuus. These verses are especially significant to the present problem inasmuch as they deplore the modesty of the former shrine as having been fit for only poor men's worship and unworthy of the remains of the great saint. Perpetuus is praised for having removed from the citizens of the city of Tours the disgrace of having so unpretentious a building by erecting one which should be worthy not only of Saint Martin but of Perpetuus as well.[25] Apparently the conception of Saint Martin as the humble recluse to whose poor appearance the fourth century bishops objected at the time of his election as Bishop of Tours, referred to above, was not uppermost in Sidonius' mind when he wrote these verses.

Aristocratic pride in his birth caused Sidonius to be openly accused by his enemies of despising the "poor of Christ".[26] This attitude would seem to indicate that aristocratic pride was recognized by contemporary ecclesiastical society as being one of its shortcomings in attaining the ideals preached by the early Church fathers and this consciousness in turn may be pointed to as a step forward in the social and psychological evolution towards that later development which it is our purpose to establish.

That this aristocratic attitude of Sidonius had its effect upon his relations with members of the lower classes is illustrated by the following incident, which he relates in a letter addressed to his nephew Secundus. It is a very graphic account of the treatment which he meted out to some poor gravediggers whom he had surprised in innocently digging on the spot where his grandfather had been buried. He was riding along on horseback when he suddenly caught sight of the men at work, turning up the earth just where the unmarked grave was located. Shouting to them to stop, Sidonius spurred his horse and dashed towards the men who, bewildered, did not know whether they should flee or stand their ground and find out what the trouble was. While they were thus hesitating, Sidonius reached them and, laying hold of them, proceeded to beat them unmercifully as a lesson, in the future, to exercise more care where they did their digging. He apparently realized that he had overstepped the bounds of his authority in thus laying hands on servants of the Church, as he goes on in the letter to explain to Secundus that the reason he had not waited to take the case before the bishop was that he knew the bishop would have dealt with the

culprits more leniently. Later he reported to the bishop concerning what had happened and was supported by the latter in the action which he had taken.[27]

In spite of the strong aristocratic feeling which still predominated in fifth-century society, there is evidence in Sidonius' letters to the effect that the prestige of the poor was increasing and that progress was being made toward the development of the importance which they enjoyed in the following century. The ideals embodied in the fundamental ideas of Christianity were gradually making inroads against the ideals of the old pagan society. Sidonius himself was exceedingly charitable and often praised this virtue in his friends.

He himself is praised by one of his contemporaries, several years after his election to the bishopric, for the concern which he shows in the interests of others, even of people whom he does not know. Although in lavishing his goods upon the poor, he is in one sense serving himself, his intentions are understood to be purely unselfish.[28] This recognition of the fact that in serving the poor, Sidonius was also serving his own interests doubtless indicates that the fifth century was cognizant of the personal benefits promised to the charitable by the early Church doctrines, although they had not developed these teachings to the point of practical application which will be found in the following period.

The tradition of Sidonius' generosity was still current in the following century, as we find mention of it made by Gregory of Tours in the *Historia Francorum*. Gregory tells us that Sidonius even took from his own home silver vases which he gave to the poor and, when reproached by his wife for the loss of the vases, he took them back but gave their value in money instead.[29]

In writing to a friend, Petreius, to console him for the loss of his great uncle, Sidonius mentions among the virtues of the deceased the fact that he had fed the hungry and clothed the naked.[30]

The matron Eutropia is eulogized for her sanctity and her charity.[31]

The outstanding example of charity on a large scale which is to be found in the *Letters* is that of Bishop Patiens of Lyons who, after the Gothic ravages had destroyed the crops, undertook to distribute grain at his own expense to the whole of the devastated region, even including parts which did not come under his ecclesiastical jurisdiction, such as the city of Clermont. Sidonius tells us that along the Saône and the Rhône, whole granaries had been filled by the bishop and that his grain carts were sent even into the most inaccessible places.[32] This gesture was unquestionably a most commendable one on the part of Bishop Patiens but it is not in-

conceivable that statesmanship entered very largely into the action as well as motives of charity and generosity, since in his high official position, it would naturally be incumbent upon him to see to the general welfare of the population living under his jurisdiction.

It was during this same famine that the senator Ecdicius, a relative of Sidonius, cared for the poor population of his part of Burgundy, as will be referred to in another connection.[33]

As bishop, Sidonius exercised his official duties in the matter of granting letters of recommendation to needy people in an attempt to help them out of various difficulties. In one letter, he recommends the bearer as being obscure, humble, harmless and insignificant and therefore deserving of having his complaint investigated, since he was obviously unable to secure justice against his formidable adversaries. His complaint was that his slaves were being secretly enticed away, an interesting complaint since it indicates that even the poor man of the fifth century might possess slaves. Sidonius thought that if the various people concerned were confronted with each other, the poor man would be able to make good his claims, although he at the same time recognizes the difficulty that would be experienced by a stranger from the country, poor, abject and unarmed, against adversaries who were not only armed but also astute, aggressive and having numerous friends as well.[34]

In another letter, he recommends for special consideration a poor merchant whose only asset was a reputation for honesty.[35]

Another one for whom Sidonius asks special dispensation from a brother bishop is a poor man who was forced to flee from his property by the invasion of the Goths. He had settled on the lands of the bishop addressed and had succeeded in sowing a crop which he now wished to keep for himself in its entirety and to be relieved of the customary tax or portion of the crop which legally belonged to the one on whose lands it had been grown. Thus the man would be able to start off on his return journey to his own home with sufficient provisions for himself and for his family.[36]

So, in the person of Sidonius, we find exemplified the worldly aristocrat but also the devoted churchman. Dill speaks of the profound change in him after his election as bishop of Clermont, which occurred in his forty-second year and which transformed him from one who had "considered it his mission to deepen the pride of rank and the pride of culture" into "one of the most devoted of pastors and spiritual governors".[37] That this change did not occur all at once is evidenced in his *Letters,* where the survivals of haughtiness and pride and ambition for family honors still persisted after he had become bishop. Nevertheless, Sidonius showed himself a

true Christian bishop in his generosity and in his devotion to his people.

Another fifth-century bishop who was outstanding in deeds of charity was Perpetuus, bishop of Tours, for whose church Sidonius Apollinaris composed the verses mentioned above. An inscription in his honor mentions this bishop's great generosity toward the poor.[38] However, the authenticity of this inscription, as well as that of Perpetuus' alleged testament, has been challenged by Julien Havet,[39] who ascribes both of these documents to a common source. We know that Perpetuus left considerable property to the Church upon his death, as this fact is attested by Gregory of Tours himself.[40] In order to make possible the forging of a document which, in the most extravagant terms, expresses the bishop's great love and care for the poor,[41] this wide generosity ascribed to him must have been in accordance with popular tradition.

An inscription, formerly placed above the sarcophagus of Saint Hilary, who died about the middle of the fifth century, speaks of this saint's great love of poverty, his scorn of worldly wealth which led him to sell all he possessed in order to help the poor, and his humble labors.[42]

Another inscription commemorates the charity of a man named Attolus, a private citizen, who was buried at Rheims with his two children in the church of Saint Julian. Attolus was noteworthy for having founded twelve "xenodochia" or hospitals and, according to LeBlant, ranks among the earliest of the founders of these charitable institutions.[43]

As has been previously mentioned, one of the greatest causes of misery during the fifth century was the barbarian invasions or raids, during which many of the inhabitants were carried off captive and were unable to buy back their freedom. One of the forms which Christian charity took at this time was the ransoming of these captives. An inscription of Marseilles recalls the suffering caused by these invasions and commemorates the Christian charity of a woman named Eugenia who ransomed many.[44] The inscription was found engraved on the lid of a sarcophagus taken from crypt of Saint Victor.[45] Another fifth-century characteristic is found in this inscription in the mention made of the high lineage of the defunct.

Sixth-century society will present a very different picture, in which this aristocratic element has been completely submerged and in which the old pagan ideals, still lingering in the remnants of the wealthy and cultured society of the fifth-century Gallo-Romans, have been replaced.

At the very beginning of the sixth century we find a completely new attitude and a new set of values represented in the person of Cesarius, bishop of Arles from 503 to 543. Saint Cesarius was so filled with the fervor of charity that, we are told, even as a child he would often take off the clothes he was wearing in order to bestow them upon some poor person. When questioned by his parents as to why he had no clothes, he would reply that someone had taken them from him.[46]

No longer was literary culture the preoccupation of society. Ennodius, bishop of Pavia (473-521), who for fifteen years had been considered the outstanding figure in Latin letters, "was converted from his literary labors, following an illness, as other people are converted from sin".[47] Churchmen exerted themselves to be called "rusticus," to be considered as speaking scarcely better than the peasants.[48] It has been pointed out, however, that this was due not to admiration for the lower classes but because the society which they were addressing was no longer composed of any but the illiterate.[49]

It was to this new society that Saint Cesarius preached respect for the poor and especially for the "poor of Christ," that is, for those who had voluntarily embraced poverty and those who were regularly maintained by the Church.[50] The tithe was exacted and the existence of Christ himself in the person of the poor was insisted upon.[51] In short, he preached almsgiving as the necessary way of atoning for sin and exacted it even from the poorest.[52]

Thus, the Church at Arles under Bishop Cesarius, at the beginning of the sixth century, was apparently exerting itself to establish its doctrines in a new society, unencumbered by the old aristocratic and pagan ideals of Roman education and culture.

It remains now to observe to what extent the Christian Church succeeded in disseminating and in developing these doctrines of almsgiving and the dignity of the poor in Gaul in the period covered by the writings of Gregory of Tours.

CHAPTER II

THE PROTECTION OF THE POOR IN THE SIXTH CENTURY

1. The Church

As has been previously suggested, the outstanding characteristic of the Merovingian age, from the social viewpoint, was its great preoccupation for the poor. The political, literary and other worldly interests of an earlier age, represented by Sidonius Apollinaris and other exponents of the decadent Roman culture, had completely disappeared and a new regime, in which the simpler and more primitive interests of the barbarian conquerors figured largely, had come into being. In this new society in which Christianity found itself confronted with a new type of convert, unsophisticated and primitive in his reactions, the same doctrines which had been preached by the early Church fathers, by Saint Cesarius of Arles, fell on more fertile ground and succeeded in establishing an increasingly strong and almost exclusive interest in social and religious matters which was even extended to include the aristocratic Gallo-Roman element as well.

One source of evidence of this new attitude is to be found in the Church councils, in which we find a notable increase in the number of canons devoted to the protection of the poor and their care, to the protection and conservation of Church property, so essential to the maintenance of their large body of dependents, including the poor, and even to the amelioration of the condition of slaves. The contrast in the number of canons devoted to these questions by the various councils of the Christian world, both before and after the beginning of the sixth century, can best be seen in tabulated form:

Location	Total number of Councils which dealt with these problems	Number of Canons concerning: Poor		Slaves		Church Property	
		Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
The East	6	7	4	2	0	6	4
Africa	6	6	0	3	0	11	0
Italy	2	0	0	0	1	1	1
Spain	9	1	4	1	4	0	10
France	18	5	25	6	16	0	46
TOTALS	41	19	33	12	21	18	61
		52		33		79	

Thus it will be seen that out of a total of forty-one Church councils which considered these problems up to the end of the sixth century, eighteen were held in France. Fourteen of these were held during the sixth century. Of the fifty-two canons enacted for the benefit of the poor, thirty were enacted in France; of the thirty-three canons which dealt with the problems of slavery, twenty-two were promulgated in France; and of the seventy-nine which were designed to preserve intact and to augment the holdings of the Church, forty-six were issued in France.

From these figures, it appears that a great preoccupation for the poor not only existed in Gaul and crystallized during the sixth century, but also that this great interest in the lower classes and in matters pertaining to them was peculiar to France at that period.[1]

Referring to the difference in the interests of the Church councils at different periods, Leclerq says: "The councils of the IV and V centuries were chiefly occupied with questions of doctrine, those of the VI, VII and VIII give their attention especially to the customs, or rather *mores,* and to the social conditions of the time. There are few councils of that epoch which do not consider the question of slavery . . . ."[2]

Regarding the increasing number of canons devoted to the conservation of Church property, Leclerq considers that these canons are proof of the great importance attached to wealth by the Church.[3] Even under the Empire, it had become customary for bishops to will their personal property to their church and this custom has been suggested as one reason for the frequency with which bishops were chosen from rich families, since these would have large possessions which would eventually become the property of the Church.[4] By the end of the seventh century, it has been estimated that one-third of Gaul was in the hands of the Church.[5]

These large possessions were not only essential for the maintenance of the many dependents of the Church, but they also contributed largely to making the Church independent of the temporal rulers. With the domains which came under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, there came also all the *coloni* and others attached to the land, as well as authority over free individuals living thereon and this jurisdiction over large tracts of land together with the inhabitants, coupled with the immunity which was acquired by the Church, made its authority complete and rendered its representatives, the bishops, completely independent of the local counts.[6] Anyone who wished to have his case judged by the bishop instead of by the civil judge could do so. This privilege was established in order to insure justice to the poor.[7]

One of the most abundant sources of this wealth was the ascetic spirit which moved persons to bestow their wealth upon the churches and monasteries before shutting themselves up in some convent to devote themselves to the religious life. Smaller gifts also poured in to swell the ever-increasing wealth of the Church, and the purpose of all these gifts was the assurance of intercession for their soul. It was during the Merovingian period that this movement crystallized and established itself.[8]

In view of the importance to the Church of its revenues, of which a definite part was assigned to the poor,[9] it is not difficult to understand the elaborate precautions which were taken to increase and to guard this wealth from the many depredations which were attempted against it on the part of individuals who saw themselves deprived of expected inheritances as well as on the part of rulers who saw in it a menace to their own power, as will appear.

At the very beginning of the sixth century, at the Council of Agde in 506, it was specifically stated that the property of the Church was the property of the poor and therefore inviolate.[10] This same council, in another canon, went on to condemn as "murderers of the poor" any who attempted to regain possession of what they or their relatives had given to a church or a convent.[11] The importance of the poor and the respect and protection considered due them were apparently well established even before this date, since the same term, "murderers of the poor" was employed in this sense for the first time by the Fourth Council of Carthage in 398[12] and was repeated by the Second Council of Arles in 443 or 452.[13] The increasing frequency with which it recurs throughout the sixth century is indicative of the many attempts which were made to get possession of property claimed by the Church.

The Fifth Council of Orléans in 549 employs this phrase in three separate canons. Canon No. 13 condemned as "murderers of the poor" those who attempted to divert from the Church property which had been given to it. Canon No. 15 anathematized as "murderers of the poor" those who might attempt to acquire property belonging to the xenodochium at Lyons. Canon No. 16 prescribed excommunication as "murderers of the poor" for any persons who might attempt to regain possession of anything given by himself or by his ancestors to priests, churches, or any other holy place.[14]

The Fifth Council of Arles in 554 qualified as "murderers of the poor" any of the older clerics who failed to take proper care of Church property entrusted to their care by the bishop. The younger ones were to be merely punished.[15]

The Third Council of Paris in 557 decreed that any one who possessed in an illegal manner and insisted upon keeping any property of the Church was to be excommunicated as a "murderer of the poor".[16]

Apparently some individuals sought to attain ownership of property claimed by the Church by arranging to receive it as a gift from the king, since we find the Council held at Clermont in 535 condemning to excommunication any persons who should thus acquire Church property as well as anyone who should seize any property belonging to the poor.[17]

Increase in the revenue of the Church was sought by insistence upon the payment of the tithe. The Second Council of Mâcon in 585 promulgated a canon which remarked that the ancient law requiring the payment of the tithe to the Church was not being observed and was to be enforced. The tithe thus received was to be used for the benefit of the poor and the clergy and also for the ransom of prisoners. Any who refused to pay it were to be perpetually excommunicated.[18]

In the *Historia Francorum,* Gregory of Tours cites several instances where determined efforts were made to gain possession of property belonging to the Church. Gregory himself had to deal with this problem frequently, in his capacity as bishop of Tours.

Even though the revenues of the Church were generally exempt from taxation and the payment of tribute, it sometimes happened that a king would attempt to revoke this exemption and collect for himself a portion of these revenues. While Injuriosus was bishop of Tours, King Chlothar ordered all the churches in his kingdom to pay one-third of their revenues to the royal treasury. Injuriosus refused to allow his church to be taxed and warned the king that if he persisted in thus robbing the poor, whom he should be feeding, he would lose his kingdom.[19] Later, King Childebert II attempted to tax the church at Tours but was prevented from doing so by Gregory himself.[20]

Gregory had also to protect the possessions of the Church even from others holding ecclesiastical office. Felix, bishop of Nantes, addressed to Gregory letters full of abuse. Gregory explains this enmity by saying that Felix wanted to get possession of certain domains of the Church and that he, Gregory, had refused to allow him to have them.[21] During a time while Gregory was absent, a priest named Riculf took over the powers of bishop and distributed as gifts to his friends various vineyards and fields belonging to the Church. Upon Gregory's return to Tours, Riculf fled from the city and the stolen property was recovered.[22]

Unfortunately it was not always possible to recover lost property, since there were some persons who felt so strongly about their alleged rights that they preferred to destroy property rather than to allow the Church to enjoy its ownership. This was the case in the dispute between the Church and Nantinus, count of Angoulême. Nantinus' uncle, Marachar, formerly count of Angoulême, had renounced his office in order to join the Church and was eventually appointed bishop of that city. When he died, he left all of his extensive possessions to the Church, much to the dissatisfaction of his nephew who claimed them on the basis that his uncle had met his death at the hands of servants of the Church and therefore that the Church had no right to them. Nantinus even went so far as forcibly to take possession of some houses which formed a part of this property and, when he found that he was about to be forced to return them to the Church, he destroyed them.[23]

Mummolus, bishop of Langres, was forced to take severe measures to protect property under his guardianship from one of his subordinates. He discovered that the deacon Lampadius had been accumulating lands, vineyards and slaves out of the spoils obtained by robbing the poor through the Church. Lampadius was deprived of all his possessions and driven out of the Church, after which he lived in extreme poverty, earning his livelihood by manual labor.[24]

It was upon the bishops themselves that the guardianship and the furtherance of the interests of the Church devolved, and it was to them also that the population looked for help in crises, both public and private. In their position as the representatives of God and of the Church, they were able to exert a powerful influence which often served to deter even the most unscrupulous from deeds of violence through the threat of eternal punishments, feared even by the most violent of their contemporaries.[25]

Their innumerable crowd of dependents included not only the regular clergy but also the clerics of lower orders, who were servants rather than ministers of the Church, the poor enrolled as dependents of their particular church, all freedmen and, in addition, many other persons who flocked voluntarily to place themselves under ecclesiastical protection in which they had more confidence than they had in the efficacy of the laws of the time.[26]

These bishops were often recruited from civil life in which many had held high positions, such as Saint Ouen under Dagobert I, Saint Namatius of Vienne, Saint Nicetius, Saint Bavon. The persistence of worldly interests even after assuming ecclesiastical office is attested by three canons, one promulgated by the Council of Agde in 506,[27] one by the Council of Épaone in 517,[28] and one

by the Second Council of Mâcon in 585,[29] which forbade bishops, priests and deacons from having in their possession hunting dogs or falcons under pain of excommunication, so that the poor might be able to approach the bishops freely and without fear.

The bishops were reminded of their responsibilities toward the poor and the afflicted by various canons. In 511, the First Council of Orléans issued a canon which stated that the bishop should, insofar as was possible, clothe and feed the poor and the sick who were unable to work.[30] The Fifth Council of Orléans made it incumbent upon the bishops to see to the appointment of a trustworthy person, to be paid by him, whose duty it would be to look after the prisoners in his district and see that they were visited every Sunday and their wretchedness thus alleviated by sympathy.[31] The lepers were likewise recommended to the bishops' particular care by the same council and the bishops were exhorted to see to it that they did not lack food or clothing.[32] The Council of Lyons in 583 repeated these stipulations, stating that lepers of each city were to be fed and clothed by the bishop of that city and were not to be allowed to beg outside of their own city.[33] The Council of Tours in 567 instructed the bishops that each community was to be responsible for feeding its own poor and that the poor should not be permitted to run around here and there in other cities.[34] The same council likewise made the bishops responsible for seeing to it that the poor received justice from the judges. It stated that judges or those in power who oppressed the poor were to be excommunicated if they did not refrain from such practices after having been exhorted to do so by the bishop.[35] A similar recommendation was made in 585 by the Second Council of Mâcon, which directed the bishops to protect widows and orphans against civil judges. Any judge who undertook to decide affairs pertaining to widows and orphans without having first notified the bishop so that the latter might appoint an archdeacon or a priest to be present was to be excommunicated.[36] The Council of Lyons in 583 also cautioned the bishops that when they gave letters of recommendation to a poor person or to a prisoner, the signature was to be quite legible and also the letter was to state the amount of money which the prisoner needed for his ransom, as well as anything else that the bearer of the letter needed.[37]

Typical of the dependence of the people upon the bishops is the instance of the poor man who was sick and came to Saint Martin for help, as mentioned by Gregory of Tours.[38]

During the siege of Orléans by the Huns under Attila, it was their bishop to whom the people in desperation appealed for instructions as to what they should do. He told them to pray for God's help and they would be delivered. When the walls were on

the point of falling, Aëtius arrived with help for the besieged city which, according to Gregory of Tours, had been saved by the intercession of the bishop.[39]

Another incident related by Gregory of Tours which is illustrative of the relation in which the bishops stood toward the people and acted as their special protectors is the following. After Desideratus, bishop of Verdun, had been restored to his office from which he had been expelled by King Theuderic (511-534), one of the son of Clovis, he found the people of the city poor and destitute. Since he had lost all his own property, he had no means of helping them. Having heard of the generosity of King Theudebert, he sent messengers to him asking that money be loaned to the citizens to aid them in recovering their former prosperity and promising to repay the money with interest. Theudebert, in response to the bishop's plea, distributed seven thousand pieces of gold among the citizens who were thus enabled to re-establish prosperity in their city. Besides lending this money so generously, King Theudebert refused to accept repayment when Desideratus offered it to him, saying that he did not need it and was satisfied with the knowledge that he had been able to relieve the misery and want of the poor.[40] It is an interesting fact that the bishop was able to repay the money borrowed.

In the sixth century, the poor people of Poitiers were relieved of a large part of the tax burden, which had come to fall especially upon them, through the intercession in their behalf of Maroveus, the bishop of Poitiers. Maroveus saw that many on the tax lists had died and the poor were obliged to bear a large part of the burden of the taxes, so he sent a request to King Childebert, asking that new tax lists be drawn up which would relieve the poor of this burden. Childebert complied and new lists were made.[41]

Gregory of Tours cites several bishops whose devotion to duty in time of danger was especially remarkable. The *Historia Francorum* speaks of the great plagues which at various times ravaged parts of Gaul, during which many of the inhabitants died. During the time when Salvius was bishop of Albi, (died 584), the city was visited by one of these plagues. Salvius distinguished himself for his devotion to the people, going around tirelessly and exhorting them to pray and keep constant vigils.[42]

A similar plague visited the city of Clermont about the year 571. Here the priest Cato showed himself to be especially devoted to his duty and, refusing to flee from the city and escape, he remained at his place burying people and saying masses until he died himself, a victim of the disease.[43]

Another danger from which the sixth-century bishops had to protect their people was that of being taken away as captives in time of war. Likewise in this respect Salvius of Albi is praised by Gregory of Tours. During King Guntram's campaign against his nephew Childebert, Guntram's general, Mummolus, captured the city of Albi and led away into captivity many of the inhabitants. Salvius followed and redeemed them all. He made such an impression on the captors that they even restored to him part of the ransom money.[44] Maroveus, bishop of Poiti ., was called upon to perform a like service for the people of his city. When Guntram's army captured Poitiers, the bishop took a gold chalice which was used in the altar service and had it made into coins to ransom the inhabitants.[45] + Himself!

Generosity toward the poor is frequently mentioned in the *Historia Francorum* as having been an important virtue of various of the bishops. Charity was considered a mark of special sanctity and this virtue often overshadowed faults. The priest Cato, mentioned above, was guilty of excessive pride but he practiced such wide charity toward the poor that this fault was discounted.[46] Nicetius, bishop of Lyons, is not only praised by Gregory of Tours for his charity but the inscription on his tomb likewise mentions this virtue.[47] Gregory tells us that he not only distributed alms generously but he also built churches and planted vineyards for the Church. After his death (573), many miracles were accomplished at his tomb.[48] Marachar, bishop of Angoulême, formerly count of that city, as mentioned above, also showed great zeal in the erection and furnishing of churches and church houses and, upon his death, left extensive domains to the Church in his will.[49] Maurilio, bishop of Cahors, is also cited by Gregory of Tours for his generosity in almsgiving. This bishop was so exceedingly zealous in his faith that he tortured himself by applying redhot irons to his feet and legs. Besides giving alms to the poor, he also distinguished himself in protecting the poor of his church from persecution by civil judges.[50] Eparchius, a recluse of Angoulême, gave proof of his holiness by extreme generosity toward the poor. If anyone gave him any money, he immediately turned it over to be used for the poor and also for the redemption of captives, of which he redeemed a great many.[51] In the same manner, Salvius, bishop of Albi, cited above, turned any money which came into his possession over to be distributed among the poor.[52] Generosity toward the poor is also mentioned by Gregory of Tours as having been one of the special virtues of Gregory the Great who, we are told, founded six monasteries in Sicily and one within the walls of the city of Rome, endowing them all with sufficient land to maintain the

monks. The rest of his large wealth he distributed among the poor.[53]

Charity toward the poor as a mark of high praise was sometimes mentioned in inscriptions composed in honor of bishops and other persons connected with the Church. An epitaph for the abbess Marie, assigned either to the end of the fifth century or perhaps to the sixth century, praises her for being persistent in almsgiving. LeBlant has assigned this inscription to the region of Narbonne. In commenting upon the date, he calls attention to the phraseology concerning the abbess' devotion to almsgiving (*persistens in elemosinis*) as being typical of the period in which he has placed it.[54]

An inscription of Vienne contains the epitaph of Namatius, bishop of that city, who died in the year 559. Namatius is praised for having redeemed captives and sent the poor away happy. Those who came to him naked, he sent away clothed.[55]

Another inscription which praises the one in whose honor it was composed for his zeal in redeeming captives is that of Saint Domninus, who was bishop of Vienne about 534. LeBlant believes it to have been placed in the church of Saint Peter beneath the picture of the bishop and also that it was written during Domninus' lifetime. He redeemed captives and also gave them food, drink, clothing and shelter.[56]

An inscription of Viviers, belonging to the first half of the sixth century, bears evidence of the love and affection of the poor which was enjoyed by the defunct. This inscription was discovered in the garden of the episcopal palace of that city and was written upon the covering of a tomb, still intact when found in 1735.[57] It has been identified as that of Pascasius, a priest who was revered for his charity and his humility. The tears of the poor had watered this tomb of one who had protected the orphans and covered the naked. His funeral was attended by a crowd of priests, clerics and common people, all praising him and lamenting his loss.[58]

The epitaph of Tetricus, bishop of Langres, who died about 573, states that he had been a supporter of churches, food for the needy, the protector of widows and the guardian of the young.[59] The generosity of Evermerus, bishop of Nantes, is likewise mentioned in his epitaph[60] as is also that of Chalactericus, bishop of Carnotena[61] and of Leontius II of Bordeaux[62] in theirs.

One epitaph composed for two bishops jointly, Ruricius I and Ruricius II, shows them to have been typical of their time in the generosity which they displayed toward the Church and toward the poor.[63] The second Ruricius was the grandson of the first and suc-

ceeded him as bishop of Limoges. They were descended from a famous family which gave to Rome a large number of prefects and consuls and which was even raised to the throne.[64]

It seems that it has been the mission of the Italians to give expression to the theory of that which had been put into practice in France. For example, in the thirteenth century, we find Thomas Aquinas furnishing the exposition of the doctrines of Christianity which had found their realization in France. So in the sixth century, it was also an Italian, Gregory the Great, elected Pope in 590, who gave us in his writings the theory of Christianity as it had been observed and practiced in sixth-century Gaul.

Gregory the Great held up the poor to the Christian world as persons whom God had placed on earth for a special purpose, that of showing His power through the miracles which were performed through them.[65] He proclaimed that humility of spirit must accompany lack of material wealth in order to qualify a person as really "poor."[66] Since one who is truly humble will not ask for anything above the bare necessities, what the poor asked for should be readily granted.[67] On the day of judgment, the poor would sit with God in judgment upon the world. Therefore voluntary poverty was to be sought.[68] This future function of the poor should be borne in mind by those giving alms, which should not be given condescendingly but rather in the spirit of making gifts to patrons.[69] The poor are cautioned against being dissatisfied with their lot and craving material things, since even they can be guilty of sinning.[70] Churchmen are exhorted not to neglect their duty of preaching and not become involved in worldly affairs. The poor cry aloud to God when this occurs, and complain that their natural protectors are neglecting them.[71]

All these ideas, fundamental ideas of Christianity it is true, were advanced in the sixth century by Gregory the Great but it was by the contemporaries and compatriots of Gregory of Tours that they were put into practice and upon whom they exerted a real influence in their daily lives.

Thus the Church strove constantly during the sixth century to increase its prestige, to identify its possessions as the possessions of the poor and to establish itself as their protector, both as individuals and as a class. The bishops were exhorted to further these aims and the many examples of devotion to their duty cited by Gregory of Tours, as well as the fact that the people in general had come to look to the bishops as their surest source of help in temporal as well as in spiritual matters, is testimony of the success which they achieved.

2. Organization of the Poor

In addition to the various sources of protection for the poor established by the Christian Church through its canons and its representatives, the bishops, there was another interesting institution which we find extant in the sixth century although it had been established and developed to a large extent in the preceding centuries.[72] This institution was the *matricula* or list of poor, either voluntary or involuntary, who were dependent upon the Church for their maintenance. Each church had its own list of poor for which it was responsible. Those whose names were included on the lists were recognizable by their costume[73] and formed a sort of corporation which owned property,[74] each in its own parish. They often lived together in a house next to that of the bishop or in some other house attached to the church property.[75] The members of the *matricula* took turns in begging alms at the doors of the church during the day. Among them were people who were sick, infirm, or otherwise unable to work. No distinction was made between Franks and Gallo-Romans, as the names of those inscribed on the rolls attest, members of each race being treated alike.[76] However, it is a curious fact that those whose names were inscribed on the registers were for the most part men. Sometimes it occurred that the names of widows also appeared there, but this was the exception rather than the rule and these registers seem to have been devoted almost exclusively to men.[77]

In this connection, it is interesting to note that the Fourth Council of Carthage, held in 398, promulgated two canons which provided for the maintenance of young and sickly widows at the expense of the Church.[78] Apparently the Church recognized a special responsibility toward women of this class, even in the early times, in spite of the fact that its regular support was devoted chiefly to men.

As a result of all this protection which was extended to them during the sixth century, the poor became thought of as a part of the Church and there was thus created a sort of *esprit de corps,* which caused the poor in their turn to identify themselves with the Church. There were occasions upon which this group of people acted spontaneously in protecting the Church and manifested active hostility toward its opponents. At such times the actions of the poor were characterized by all the violence and ferocity typical of their epoch.

One example of this sort of action related in the *Historia Francorum* took place in Gregory's time. In this case, the poor of the *matricula,* joined by the other poor who were present at the time, rose up in a mass to protect the sanctity of their church.

Eberulf, formerly chamberlain to King ~~Sigibert~~ Hilperik, was accused of having assassinated him and was pursued by King Guntram, who intended to avenge the murder of his brother. Eberulf took sanctuary in the basilica of Saint Martin, where he hoped that the right of sanctuary extended by the Church would be respected by his pursuers and would protect him from them, but even this last resort failed him. (Incidentally, the sanctuary extended by the Church was an exceedingly important institution in Merovingian times and persons of all classes, from royalty down to slaves, availed themselves of it when the necessity arose. It was only upon very rare occasions that the Church was unable to maintain it effectively.) Claudius, the envoy of King Guntram, pursued Eberulf right into the basilica itself, where he fell upon him and killed him. In doing this he was doubly guilty. He had not only violated the sacred right of sanctuary insisted upon by the Church but he also profaned the basilica by thus spilling blood within its precincts. Pursued in turn by the servants of Eberulf, Claudius sought sanctuary in the cell of the abbot, but this did not deter his pursuers. Finding the doors locked, they broke into the cell, killed Claudius and dragged out the abbot. In the meantime a crowd of beggars and poor people, including those on the *matricula* of the church of Saint Martin, fell on the followers of both Eberulf and Claudius. They first had collected on the scene. Armed with stones and clubs, this mob dragged them out of the church and then murdered them all, leaving their bodies lying naked on the ground.[79]

These *matricularii* not only felt themselves to be definitely a part of the organization of the Church, but by the sixth century they were a well organized unit and were able to act as such in their own interests, to transact business and to enter into contracts as an organization and for their own profit.

One morning the *matricularii* of the church of Saint Martin at Tours, (that is, those whose names appeared on the register of that church and were authorized to collect alms at the door,) found a newborn child, wrapped in rags. For three days they made inquiries in an effort to ascertain to whom the child belonged but without success. Then, with the help and advice of their priest, they entered into negotiations with a man who was willing to buy the child. The price was agreed upon and paid and the *matricularii* divided the money among themselves. In order to make the bargain more binding and to protect the purchaser from future claims on the part of the parents or owner of the child, they added to the record of the transaction a quotation from the Theodosian Code, which stipulated that if anyone took a newborn child to raise and the master or the father of the child wished to take it

away from him, the one who raised the child should receive either the legal possession of it or the price that it was worth.[80]

In this connection, attention is called to the fact that the First Council of Vaison in 442 had promulgated two canons which provided a procedure to be followed when an abandoned child was found and also provided a penalty for anyone who challenged the claim to the child of the person finding it. Canon No. 9 of this council stipulated that on the Sunday following the finding of the child, the deacon should announce from the altar the fact that such a child had been found and could be reclaimed within ten days. After ten days had passed, if no one claimed the child, it became the property of the one who had found it.[81] Canon No. 10 provided a penalty for anyone who attempted to reclaim a child from the person who had found it after the ten days had elapsed or who accused the person of having stolen it. Anyone making such an attempt was to be punished by the Church as a murderer and the child was to remain the property and the slave of him who had found it.[82]

In the instance cited above, we see the poor of the *matricula* in the sixth century exercising the legal rights extended to individuals in the preceding century. Probably these were the first groups to be organized that way.

An episode from the *Miracles of Saint Martin* throws further light upon the manner in which these organizations of the *matricularii* were accustomed to operate. Gregory of Tours tells us that it was customary for the devout to bring things necessary to the members of the *matricula,* whose maintenance by the Church was obtained through gifts donated for this purpose. At night, after most of the gifts which might be expected for that day had been collected, the poor of the *matricula* went away but left one of their number at the door of the church to take care of any gifts which might come in later.[88]

It seems from the above that by the sixth century the poor were not only well organized and functioning as an important branch of the activity of the Church but also that their rôle was not always a passive one. Although adding materially to the financial burden of the Church, these poor also added materially to her sphere of influence.

It is true that the *matricularii* did not include all the poor but they were certainly the poorest of all, having nothing and living exclusively on alms. Yet even these poorest of the poor wielded a certain influence and were a recognized part of society.

The number of poor definitely attached to a particular church by having their names inscribed on the register varied according

to the size and importance of the place. Lesne finds that whereas the cathedral church at Autun enrolled forty *matricularii,* the oratory of Saint-Léger attached to the basilica of Saint Symphorien at Autun counted only four among its regular dependents thus enrolled.[84] That the church of Saint Martin at Tours must have had a large number of *matricularii* is apparent from the fact that, together with the other poor who were present at the time, they were able to attack and kill the armed followers of both Claude and Eberulf, mentioned above. Fortunatus too, indicates that the crowd of poor at this church must have been exceedingly large, in a poem addressed to Count Sigoaldus "who fed the poor for the king". The poet claims that Sigoaldus, in the name of Childebert II, fed thousands of poor people,[85] but it is extremely doubtful whether Fortunatus should be interpreted literally in this statement. However, the *matricularii* together with the crowd of indigent and infirm who flocked thither, the large number of pilgrims attracted by the shrine of the famous saint and the army of beggars who took their place in the atrium and near the church would have made a formidable multitude.

3. Protection Outside of the Church

In the *Historia Francorum,* Gregory of Tours recognized the fact that the powerful ruling class at times performed acts of charity toward the poor and in various ways gave evidence of wishing to protect Church property and that of its dependents. That acts of charity on a large scale were not confined to the bishops has been seen in the fifth-century inscriptions mentioned above which celebrate the founding of charitable institutions and the ransoming of captives by private citizens. Another person who lived in the fifth century but whose generosity is praised at length by Gregory of Tours was Ecdicius, a senator and contemporary of Sidonius Apollinaris. That Ecdicius distinguished himself in his charitable acts has already been mentioned. During a famine in Burgundy in 474,[86] he sent his servants to neighboring towns with wagons in which they brought back all the poor whom they could find. Ecdicius kept them all at his house and fed and maintained them until after the famine had passed, when he sent them back to their homes. It has been said that he saved from starvation more than four thousand persons.[87]

A disposition to spare the property of the Church was shown by Clovis himself, even before his conversion to Christianity in 496. Perhaps the inclusion of this well-known story will be permitted here since the respect for the Church and the willingness to be on friendly terms with its leaders, the bishops, which Clovis

showed in this case were most unusual on the part of a barbarian king bent on conquering Roman territory. A sacred vessel had been taken while Clovis' troops were plundering the churches of Soissons and the bishop asked that it be restored, even though all the rest of the treasures were lost. Clovis promised that this should be done and, when the warriors were dividing the spoils, he asked them to grant him the vase in question as his special prize. Only one of them objected and he, raising his axe, struck the vase shouting that no one ought to receive more than his just share. Clovis restrained his anger and gave the vase to the bishop's envoy who had come to receive it, but he did not forget the insult which had been proffered to him. A year later, while inspecting the arms of his soldiers, he came to the one who had opposed him. He upbraided him for the poor condition of his arms and, taking the soldier's axe, he threw it on the ground. The man bent down to pick it up and Clovis, raising his own axe, brought it down on the man's skull saying, "Thus did you treat the vase at Soissons." As a result, Clovis' prestige with his soldiers was greatly increased.[88]

Great respect for the property belonging to the church of Saint Martin on the part of Clovis is also cited by Gregory of Tours. Clovis resented the fact that a part of Gaul was still in the hands of the Visigoths who were Arians and, as a Catholic king, considered this good cause to invade their territory. So, in 507, he gathered together his army and marched on Poitiers where Alaric, king of the Visigoths, happened to be. Part of his army had to pass through the territory of Tours and Clovis cautioned the soldiers not to touch anything in that region excepting water and grass. One of the soldiers found some hay which belonged to a poor man and, arguing that after all hay was nothing more than grass, he took it from the poor man by force. When Clovis heard what the soldier had done, he killed him with his own sword.[89]

One of the grandsons of Clovis, Theudebert, who reigned from 534 to 548, won for himself a reputation for generosity. The manner in which he showed himself the benefactor of the city of Verdun has already been discussed. He is highly praised in the *Historia Francorum* in which Gregory of Tours says that he not only honored the bishops, succored the poor and was liberal to everyone but he also exempted the churches of Auvergne from all payment of tribute to the royal treasury.[90]

There are not many nobles mentioned in the account of Gregory of Tours as having distinguished themselves for their virtue and charity, but the charity of those who are so mentioned seems to have been exceptionally great. One of these, Marachar, count of An-

goulême, who afterwards became bishop, has already been mentioned.

Another noble whose charity toward the poor was especially remarkable was Chrodinus, who held a high position at the court of Austrasia. Fortunatus has addressed a poem to him in which he refers to him as "Duke Chrodinus" and praises his equity and justice[91] and Fredegarius relates the fact that after the death of Sigibert, the post of *nutritor* or tutor to Sigibert's infant son was offered to him but he refused it in favor of Gogo. Previously, he had served as major domo in the royal household.[92] In mentioning his death in 582, Gregory of Tours praises his goodness and piety and especially his generosity toward the Church and toward the poor. He tells us that Chrodinus would often lay out country estates, plant vineyards, put the land under cultivation and build houses. Then he would invite to dinner bishops whose revenues were small and distribute among them all these estates, together with the buildings, the utensils and furnishings, the laborers, servants and slaves, in order that these things might be used by the Church for the benefit of the poor. Chrodinus was over seventy years old when he died and Gregory says that it would be impossible to relate all the good deeds that this man had performed during the course of his long life.[93]

Even in time of war there was some effort made to protect the poor and helpless inhabitants from being made to suffer the destruction of their crops and property by an army passing through their territory. Mummolus, general and patrician under King Guntram, on behalf of the inhabitants, exacted retribution from the Saxon hordes who had entered Guntram's kingdom bent on plunder. He made the invaders abandon all their plunder and prisoners and then allowed them to proceed on their way. The following year, returning to Gaul, they again passed through Guntram's kingdom and again laid waste the country. When they reached the Rhône river and were about to pass over into Sigibert's kingdom on their way to the place from which they had originally come, Mummolus met them and would not let them pass until after they had given satisfaction to those whom they had robbed and plundered of all their possessions.[94] IV. 43

An effort to save the inhabitants from bearing the brunt of the fratricidal war between their two kingdoms was made by both Chilperic and Sigibert. Sigibert had called to his aid barbarian hordes from across the Rhine. In order to avoid their common ruin in the event of a battle, Chilperic agreed to restore to Sigibert cities which had been taken from him, Chilperic, by his son Theudebert. He made the condition however, that Sigibert would not

make reprisals against the population of these regions for their changing their allegiance after they had been captured and forced to do so by Theudebert. Meanwhile Sigibert's followers had devastated the region around Paris and had taken many of the inhabitants captive. Sigibert did all that he could to restrain these barbarians but was not able to accomplish much in this respect.[95]

King Guntram especially enjoyed the good will of Gregory of Tours and we find mention of the virtues of this king appearing frequently in the *Historia.* He won this high position in Gregory's regard through the protection and the generosity which he bestowed upon the Church which, we must remember, in those days meant upon the poor as well. One act which Gregory found especially commendable was the restoring to the Church of property left to it in wills which Chilperic, Guntram's predecessor, had broken. His generosity toward the poor is also praised.[96] Upon another occasion, Guntram is praised for having distributed among the poor and the Church the treasures which he took from the pretender Gundovald.[97] Another instance of his lavish generosity toward the Church was the disposition which he made of the treasures belonging to Duke Mummolus which Guntram seized after the death of his former general. The king invited Gregory to dinner and, while the food was being served, he called the bishop's attention to the silver dishes. He told him that he had caused to be broken up fifteen large pieces, reserving only two for himself. Since he had no son of his own and since his nephew Childebert already had enough treasure left him by his father, Sigibert, Guntram had decided to give the remainder of the large treasure which had belonged to Mummolus to the poor and to the Church.[98]

With Gregory of Tours, generosity toward the Church and its dependents was sure to be a sign of merit in the individual. Therefore, when King Childebert II. remitted all the taxes due from the churches and from everyone connected with the Church at Clermont, he was highly praised by the bishop of Tours.[99]

Charity and generosity toward the poor were also highly praised by Fortunatus in many persons to whom he addressed poems and in whose honor he composed epitaphs. This Italian poet, who later became bishop of Poitiers and was the friend and contemporary of Gregory of Tours, was a prolific writer and in his works we have an important source of testimony regarding Merovingian society,[100] in spite of the fact that his judgment of individuals is to be discounted. He was responsible for a very large proportion of the inscriptions which we possess which were composed in sixth-century Gaul. Out of a total of thirty-five inscriptions mentioning the attitude toward the poor, twenty-two were composed by him

and are dedicated to his predecessors as well as to his contemporaries.

The inscription which he composed as an epitaph in honor of Theudechild, daughter of Theoderic, bears evidence of the generosity of the defunct towards the poor. Her death was said to have been lamented by the poor, the widows and the orphans.[101] Berthoara, the daughter of Theodebert, is likewise praised for having been a supporter of temples and generous to the poor.[102] The wife of Bishop Namatius of Vienne aided the homeless, widows, captives and all the poor.[103] A woman named Vilithuta is praised in her epitaph for having been generous to the churches and the poor.[104]

In addition to the poem which Fortunatus addressed to Count Sigoaldus, mentioned above, he likewise praised various other individuals for their charity and generosity. Duke Bodegisil is praised for his great justice to the poor,[105] a man named Avolus is praised for having practiced his charity secretly instead of for the sake of public show,[106] Duke Launebod had even distributed his alms with his own hands[107] and, together with his wife Beretrude, built the church of Saint Saturninus at Toulouse, where the name still survives in the modern name of "Saint Sernin".

There were also other epitaphs not written by Fortunatus which extolled this virtue of charity toward the poor. Among them is to be found one for Caretene, who married Chilperic, king of Lyons. In an inscription assigned to the year 506, she is said to have cherished the poor.[108]

An inscription of Arles, so badly mutilated that it is impossible to make even an attempt at restoration, is yet identified as belonging to the Merovingian period by the presence of an insignia typical of that time. Among the few words which remain legible is the word *pauper,* doubtless indicating that the inscription originally mentioned charity toward the poor among the various virtues of the defunct.[109]

Another epitaph belonging to the sixth century is exceedingly brief. It was composed in honor of a man named Viliaric who was a "father to the poor". The stone bearing the inscription was used in the building of the old church of Saint-Laurent-de-Mûre at Vienne and has also been placed in the outer wall of the new church.[110]

The epitaph of one Epaefanius, formerly in the church of Saint-Just of Vienne, praises the defunct as having been "dutiful toward the poor".[111] In this inscription, by the way, in the phrase *pius pauperibus,* we find the word *pius* used in an interesting sense, marking a step in the evolution of the word toward the sense of "pity".

Another epitaph composed in honor of a woman named Dulcitia and assigned to the year 564 or 579, praises her wide charity.[112] This virtue is also praised in fragments of three inscriptions of Vienne, to which no definite date can be ascribed.[113]

An inscription from the priory of Saint-Maurice, near Venasque, contains the epitaph of a noble Christian and of his wife. The husband had died abroad but his body had been brought back to his wife who had buried it with honor and then had lived in widowhood for seven years. The woman, although miserly with herself, had been prodigal toward the poor.[114]

A merchant named Agapus, who died in 601, is praised for having been the consolation of the afflicted and the refuge of the poor.[115]

Consequently, there were various sources of protection for the poor in the sixth century. The Christian Church had evolved into a powerful and far reaching institution. Its leaders, the bishops, were frequently men of the world who had occupied high posts in civil life before taking ecclesiastical office and were therefore well informed concerning the society against which they were to exercise their office as special protectors of the poor. The larger their crowd of dependents grew, reciprocally, their sphere of influence was proportionately widened. In addition to the various methods of protection developed by the Church, there were also members of the ruling class who distinguished themselves in acts of charity and generosity, including even royalty. The queens Clothilde and Radegund especially devoted themselves to deeds of charity and compassion.[116]

Curiously enough, this preoccupation for the poor which had come to occupy so large a place in Merovingian society is not very often mentioned in the epitaphs and inscriptions of the period. Out of 708 inscriptions listed by LeBlant, only 46 mention the poor. Of these forty-six:

6 belong to the 5th century
35 belong to the 6th century
(22 of these were composed by Fortunatus)
2 belong to the 7th century
3 can be assigned to no definite period

When examined from the standpoint of the persons for whom they were written, we have these forty-six divided as follows:

18 are dedicated to bishops
(of these, 8 were composed to celebrate some act of Saint Martin)
28 are dedicated to persons other than bishops
(of these, 1 is for an abbess, 1 for a priest)

Of the collection made by Diehl,[117] consisting of five thousand inscriptions, only twenty-seven mention the poor. Diehl does not include those composed by Fortunatus, doubtless for the reason that these have come down to us in manuscript form and hence are not true inscriptions. The distribution of these by centuries is as follows:

Century	*Country*
3	1 for Gaul
4	5 for Rome
5	2 for Rome
6	6 for Gaul
	1 for Africa
7	1 for Gaul
	1 for Rome

There are ten for which no definite date can be assigned and these are distributed by countries as follows: 1 for Spain, 1 for Africa, 4 for Italy, 1 for Germany, and 3 for Gaul.

Of these twenty-seven, eight were identical with those published by LeBlant and these eight will not be considered in the following calculations in order to avoid repetition. Therefore, of the nineteen remaining, six referred to bishops or to persons holding some office in the Church and the remaining thirteen were the epitaphs of other people, both men and women, who had mention made in their epitaphs of their interest in the poor.

At first sight this lack of mention of interest in the poor seems strange but, as a matter of fact, no special significance can be attached to it for several reasons. In the first place, it is evident that the number of inscriptions which have been destroyed is so great that any statistics made upon the basis of those that remain would not have weight. This is illustrated by the great number of bishops for whom we have no record of any epitaph or inscription and, certainly, this is one class of people for whom we might expect to have had epitaphs composed in their honor. Of the 2845 bishops included in the *Fastes épiscopaux de la Gaule,* only fifty-four are mentioned as having epitaphs of which we have knowledge. No mention is made of any epitaph for Gregory of Tours himself. The distribution of these fifty-four by centuries is as follows:

Century	*Number of epitaphs*
4	1
5	10
6	28
7	1
8	4
9	9
10	1

Furthermore, in the early days of Christianity, its followers were recruited largely from the lower orders of society, as has been previously mentioned, and even largely from slaves. These people would not be likely to hàve any inscriptions written to perpetuate their memory. Even for those of the upper classes, it was necessary to keep secret their religion in order to avoid persecution, and this would also preclude any mention of their Christian virtues in their epitaphs. It would also account for the great dearth of Christian inscriptions prior to the second half of the fifth century.[118] After that time, the prestige and increasing spread of Christianity in Gaul began to make itself felt and we find evidence of this in the increase in the number of inscriptions which have survived composed after that date. In the statistics cited above for the epitaphs of bishops, whereas we have only one for the fourth century, we have ten for the fifth and twenty-eight for the sixth.

Another reason which may be assigned to the absence of all mention of charity toward the poor in so many inscriptions is the brevity of the formulae used in the great majority of epitaphs. These omitted details concerning the person whose tomb they were destined to mark and for the most part simply mentioned the name of the defunct and the time of death. This is true even of the epitaphs of many bishops, which make no mention of their special care for the poor, although we know from other sources that the poor were one of the chief preoccupations of these leaders of the Church, as mentioned above.

A situation in which the poor were receiving so much consideration would naturally tend to permit the rise in the world of the most fortunate of them and also of the most ruthless.

CHAPTER III

THE POOR WERE NO LONGER HINDERED BY UNSURMOUNTABLE CLASS BARRIERS

With the decay of the middle class in the fifth century,[1] society was now divided into two classes, the rich and the poor. Among the poor in this study we have included the slaves because of the negligible difference which existed between their lowly state and that of the *coloni* and dependents of the great landholders under whose protection they lived. It is well known that, as a result of the barbarian invasions, the various divisions of the lower classes, slaves, serfs and *coloni,* carefully distinguished by Roman law, were now approximately only distinguished from each other in name. The condition of the poor inhabitants of the country districts was on the same level for all.[2] Out of this lowest of classes, there arose in the sixth century a not inconsiderable number of persons of both sexes who, through sheer ruthlessness and force of character, succeeded in raising themselves to positions of power and influence second to none.

A number of the women whom the Merovingian kings married were of low and even servile origin. King Chlothar, who married Radegund, had numerous connections of which at least two were the daughters of a serf and sisters besides, Ingund and Aregund. He first married Ingund, of servile origin but who, as we are told in the account given in the *Liber Historiae Francorum,*[3] was both beautiful and decorous. Believing herself to be firmly established in her position—since, as we are told in Gregory's account of the story, Chlothar loved her deeply,—Ingund asked the king to find for her sister a suitable husband in order that Aregund's lowly condition might not be a source of shame to them both. Chlothar made a trip to the domain where Aregund was living and, desiring her himself, married her. He afterwards returned to Ingund and told her that he had tried to find a suitable husband for her sister but had been able to find none more suitable than himself. Ingund meekly replied that he might do anything that was pleasing to him and hoped that she herself might continue to enjoy his favor.[4]

Chlothar's sons followed in his footsteps in the matter of choosing their wives. Of King Guntram's wives, one was of servile origin as was also his concubine, Veneranda. He first took Veneranda, a servant of one of his subjects and by whom he had a son,

Gundobad. Afterwards he married Marcatrude, daughter of a noble, who was accused of having poisoned Veneranda's son. For this deed the king discarded her and she died soon afterwards. He next married Austrechild, also called "Bobila", concerning whose servile origin we are informed by Fredegarius.[5 and 6] Austrechild is described by Gregory as having been a most detestable woman. On her deathbed she made Guntram swear that if she died, the doctors who were in attendance upon her would be killed. Upon her death, Guntram thought himself obliged to keep his oath and the doctors were put to death by the sword.[7]

Several of King Charibert's wives were likewise of servile origin. Two of them were sisters, Marcovefa and Merofled, the daughters of a poor wool-worker and another, Theudechild, was the daughter of a shepherd. After Charibert's death, Theudechild sent messengers to King Guntram, offering herself and her treasures to him. He accepted and when he had received her, he took the treasures but banished Theudechild herself to a nunnery at Arles.[8]

King Sigibert was disgusted upon seeing his brothers allying themselves with servants. He asked for and received in marriage Brunhildis, the daughter of King Athanagild the Visigoth.[9] This aroused the envy of King Chilperic who, although he already had several wives, put them all away and married Brunhildis' sister Galeswintha. In order to marry her however, he had had to dismiss his mistress, Fredegundis, who made Galeswintha so unhappy that she begged Chilperic to keep her treasures but to send her back to Spain. Instead, he had her strangled and married Fredegundis.[10]

Queen Fredegundis is perhaps the outstanding example of her time of a woman who rose from the lowest to the highest position in society and her career has furnished the theme for many of Gregory of Tours' most colorful episodes as well as some of those which most clearly represent the spirit of the Merovingian age. Although Gregory does not mention Fredegundis' origin, the author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* tells us that it was of the humblest.[11] The stories that are related concerning her[12] show that she was not only completely unscrupulous but also that she was a very clever and resourceful woman as well as an extremely fascinating one. In a battle of wits and strategy, it was never the former servant-woman who proved inferior to any. She disposed of two nobly born rivals, Audovera and Galeswintha, and held undisputed control over Chilperic's affections until his death.

The manner in which, according to legend,[13] she disposed of Queen Audovera, her mistress, is typical of her resourcefulness and is related by the author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum*. While

Chilperic was absent, Audovera gave birth to a daughter. Although there was no one present to act as godmother to the child, Fredegundis suggested that the queen proceed with the baptismal ceremony and herself receive it from the fount. In her simplicity, Audovera followed the malicious suggestion thereby making herself ineligible to remain the wife of Chilperic according to the law of the Church. As soon as Chilperic returned, Fredegundis informed him that Audovera was now the godmother of his child, so he discarded her in favor of Fredegundis.[14]

This low-born woman stopped at nothing if she considered it necessary for her own well being. The author of the *Liber Historiae Francorum* even credits her with having inspired the assassination of Chilperic, her husband, upon his discovery of her intrigue with Landeric, the major domo of the palace, as she knew it was a case of either the king's death or her own.[15]

The careers of several men of the period who, although of servile origin, succeeded in gaining power, wealth and prestige, are no less remarkable for their ruthlessness than for the high positions which they attained.

In the person of Charegisel, chamberlain to King Sigibert, we have an example of a man who had succeeded in raising himself to a position among the king's retainers, in spite of his low origin. When King Sigibert was stabbed with the poisoned knives of assassins sent by Fredegundis, his chamberlain was killed with him. Gregory of Tours speaks of Charegisel with scorn, saying that he had attained his place by flattering the king and describes him as a person who did not hesitate to tamper with wills in order to get possession of property intended for the Church.[16]

Another upstart whose career is related in detail by Gregory of Tours is his enemy Leudast, count of Tours. Leudast's father was a serf named Leucadius, a vinedresser on one of the royal domains.[17] Leudast himself was duly summoned to service and set to work in the royal kitchens. He pretended to enjoy his work but he escaped and ran away. After he had been recaptured and brought back several times, he was finally punished by having one of his ears slit, as the mark of a runaway slave. Although he was unable to conceal this branding mark, Leudast again escaped and ran away but this time he took refuge with Queen Marcovefa, herself the daughter of a poor man, as mentioned above, whom King Charibert had married. This marked the beginning of the rise in Leudast's fortunes. Like his contemporary Fredegundis, he owed his opportunity to royal favor. Marcovefa immediately took him under her special protection and assigned to his care her best horses. Shortly afterwards, he asked for and received the im-

portant office of count of the stables. As the queen's special favorite, he was also sent about on her affairs all the while increasing his power and making more secure his position. Upon the death of Marcovefa, he retained his office by means of making presents to King Charibert.

He next succeeded in having himself named count of the city of Tours where, according to Gregory, he abused his office in every conceivable way.[18] Naturally, this position enabled him to amass a very large fortune.

However, with the death of King Charibert, the city of Tours fell into the hands of King Sigibert and Leudast's misfortunes began. He was deprived by his new master of all his treasures and possessions; consequently he transferred his loyalty to King Chilperic, Sigibert's brother and the husband of Fredegundis. Chilperic seized the city of Tours and restored Leudast to his office, to regain which he had to take an oath to uphold the Church.

After the exposure of his plot with Riculf against Gregory, whom they accused of having slandered Queen Fredegundis, Leudast was forced to flee and only saved his life by taking refuge in the church at Poitiers. He finally secured an audience with King Chilperic and returned to Paris with him. There he threw himself at Fredegundis' feet and begged her forgiveness but Fredegundis thrust him from her. He followed her into the street where he was attacked and wounded by the queen's servants. He again took flight but, as he was passing over the city bridge, his foot slipped between two of the planks and he fell, breaking his leg, and so was taken prisoner. The king ordered his wounds, which were badly infected, to be cared for while he was in prison in order that he might live to be subjected to lingering torture. Fredegundis, however, had him killed with characteristic thoroughness and dispatch.[19] Thus ended the career of one who, although born a slave, succeeded in gaining for himself fortune and power and also in giving considerable trouble to a great bishop, Gregory of Tours himself, as well as to the redoubtable Fredegundis.

Andarchius, who also started life as a slave, succeeded in rising to a position of importance under King Sigibert. He was first permitted to share in the studies of his master and thus acquired an education. Gregory says that he was well versed in the works of Virgil, in the Theodosian code and in mathematics. He next succeeded in placing himself under the patronage of Duke Lupus who recommended him to Sigibert. As the special representative of the king, he possessed official rank and even aspired to marry the daughter of Ursus, a wealthy citizen of Clermont. He tricked Sigibert into ordering that all of Ursus' property be turned over to

him but was murdered with seven of his servants, burned alive in a house belonging to Ursus and of which he was attempting to take possession. Ursus, the author of this deed, was not punished but on the contrary, after making presents to King Sigibert, had restored to him all of his property which had been confiscated.[20]

Still another one who was born a serf but succeeded in attaining rank and prestige was Marileif, who at one time occupied the position of chief physician in the household of King Chilperic. Gregory does not tell us where Marileif studied medicine nor how he came to have the opportunity to do so. We know, however, that schools of medicine were established in Gaul and it is even possible that persons went to Constantinople to study, as we find another physician in the *Historia Francorum* who claimed to have learned how to perform an operation by seeing it performed by surgeons in that city.[21] Marileif's father had had the care of the church mills and had also worked in the royal kitchens and bakery. Notwithstanding his lowly parentage, Marileif secured a position in the royal household and had apparently amassed a considerable fortune which King Guntram confiscated when he reduced Marileif to his former social rank.[22]

There are also other examples mentioned by Gregory of Tours of persons born in a lowly condition who succeeded in attaining important positions in the Church. Riculf the priest, who attempted to bestow Church property upon his friends during Gregory's absence from Tours, mentioned above, as well as conniving at his bishop's downfall in the plot with Leudast, was of lowly origin. He was first raised from his poor estate by Bishop Eufronius, who ordained him archdeacon, from which office he was subsequently advanced to the priesthood.[23]

In Leo, the thirteenth bishop of Tours, we have an example of a skilled artisan who succeeded in raising himself to a higher rank. Leo was abbot of the church of Saint Martin before being made bishop.[24] It was indeed an achievement for one of low birth to raise himself to a position sought by members of the aristocratic and wealthy senatorial families. This tradition of a bishop-artisan was evidently continued since, in the reign of Dagobert I., we have the example of Saint Eligius who was also an artisan and worked in gems and precious metals.[25]

Another and still more notable example of such a rise is to be found in the career of Injuriosus, bishop of Tours. Gregory tells us that although Injuriosus was not born a slave and was a citizen of Tours, yet he sprang from the lower class.[26] In spite of his humble beginnings, he rose to the important position of

bishop of Tours and in that capacity even opposed King Chlothar when the latter attempted to tax the Church, as mentioned above.[27]

The success of these people in improving their social status and in acquiring wealth and influence was undoubtedly furthered by the general spirit of violence and unscrupulousness which characterized the period. It is significant that the most unscrupulous of them all, the famous Fredegundis, was the one who succeeded in maintaining the longest enjoyment of her new found honors. In spite of a life of unbridled savagery and crime, Fredegundis died "old and full of days",[28] and was buried in the church of Saint Vincent at Paris. Also, it was Fredegundis' line which survived and was continued by King Dagobert in the following century, while the descendants of her hated and nobly born rival, Queen Brunhildis of Austrasia, all perished.

These are just a few of the most outstanding people in this society who attained special prominence in spite of their low birth. There were doubtless many like them but whose ambitions did not happen to clash with the interests of the Church so frequently and thus did not merit so much of Gregory of Tours' attention.

Yet this very violence and lack of restraint which existed in all parts of Merovingian society and which enabled these individuals to achieve power and wealth which would have been impossible of attainment in a well-ordered, conventional society characterized by a spirit of moderation, this general roughness which increased the opportunities of a few only added to the burden of the poor as a class and rendered increasingly difficult the problem of protecting them and fostering respect for their possessions.

CHAPTER IV

DIFFICULTIES IN PROTECTING THE POOR ENCOUNTERED AT THIS PERIOD

1. General Violence

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in their self-appointed task of protecting the poor and the weak encountered by the Christian Church as well as by individuals disposed to alleviate the sufferings of this class during the sixth century was the general roughness and violence of the times. In contrast with the "rather monotonous tranquillity of sequestered estates in Auvergne"[1] pictured in the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris, the Merovingian society in the sixth century, as described in the *Historia Francorum,* presents a picture colored by murder, violence, avarice and lust, in which members of the upper class always went abroad armed or accompanied by an armed retinue,[2] prepared for any emergency either of aggression or of defense.

While it is true that the new possession of power and wealth by barbarians unaccustomed to these things, as well as the necessity for self-protection, might seem partially to explain if not to excuse the violent deeds recorded by Gregory of Tours (which, by the way, were not confined to the Franks but were committed also by the Gallo-Romans), the judgment of commentators on the period is a severe one. In the words of one historian, "the tale of the Merovingians is in the main a ghastly record".[3]

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that it is in contrast with our modern standards that the customs of the Merovingians seem so rough and so violent. Gregory of Tours himself does not appear to have taken his contemporaries to task for the violence of their acts except in the case of outstanding individuals such as Fredegundis and Leudast, who had a long list of crimes to their credit. Of the *mores* of the times in general, he says nothing.

Furthermore, we even have evidence to the effect that there were some who thought that these sixth-century Franks were not so much worse than other nations of the time. This is the case in the writings of Agathias, a Greek historian who lived in the sixth century and who had occasion to observe them at close range during the campaign of Narses in Italy, in which he was joined by an army of Franks under King Theudebert. In view of the general condemnation of historians upon the Merovingian period, the opinions

expressed by Agathias are especially interesting, even though his judgment has not remained unchallenged.[4]

In discussing the city of Marseilles, this Greek scholar finds it by no means inferior in dignity to what it was when it was a Greek colony.[5] He finds the Franks using the Roman political system and laws. They are all Christians with a strong religious sentiment. They have their magistrates and priests in their cities and celebrate various festivals in the same manner as the Greeks. For a barbarian people, Agathias finds them exceedingly civil and courteous and differing in no way from his own compatriots except in their dress and in the correctness of speech. He expresses great surprise at their wealth and, what is most surprising, at the justice and spirit of concord to be found among them.[6] The conduct of the Franks, Agathias finds presenting a distinct contrast to that of the "Alemannica", or Germans, who also formed a part of the army of Leutharis and Butilinus, Byzantine leaders. Whereas the Franks showed great respect for the temples and sacred things in general, the Germans plundered everything they could get their hands on, even the furnishings of temples, and polluted the plowed fields by leaving unburied bodies lying around.[7]

In spite of all of this favorable testimony however, the fact remains that the society represented by Gregory of Tours was fundamentally a violent one. There was no longer any strong, centralized government to enforce law and order and there was no longer any tradition of law and right conduct to be followed. There existed no check on human action except that which resided in the conscience of some individuals or in the fear of retribution. As a natural consequence of such a condition, the poor and the weak were exposed to much hardship and the problem of protecting them from hunger, their possessions from being plundered and their persons from abuse and even captivity, was an extremely difficult one.

In the matter of punishment, the Merovingians displayed savage cruelty towards all classes when a punishment was actually inflicted. King Chilperic is condemned by Gregory as having been especially cruel in this respect and always on the lookout for new ways of torturing his victims. His favorite punishment was to have them blinded and, in issuing instructions to his judges, he always closed with the words: "If anybody disregards our decrees, let him be punished by the tearing out of his eyes."[8] Physical mutilation was common and we find in the *Historia Francorum* innumerable instances of persons having their hands and feet and their ears and noses cut off.

The nobles and the rich were often able to bribe officials and in many instances they obtained dismissal of charges against them by making presents to the king himself, as in the case of Ursus. With the lower class however, there was no such means of escape. Refractory servants were often cruelly beaten, mutilated and even murdered, in spite of the fact that King Chlothar I, the first of his race to do so, had forbidden anyone to take the life of his slave.[9] Also, Canon No. 34 of the Council of Épaone in Burgundy in 517 prohibited a master from killing his slave without the permission of a judge under pain of excommunication for two years.[10] That such laws were sometimes enforced is proved by a case mentioned in the *Historia Francorum* where a man guilty of murdering another man's servants was convicted of homicide by a tribunal of citizens.[11] However, all these things did not deter some of the more unscrupulous from doing what they pleased.

Gregory of Tours tells about several incidents where this cruelty was especially remarkable in punishments inflicted on slaves.

In one case, a slave who had been driven to strike his master in self-defense was seized by the master's friends who summarily cut off his hands and feet and then had him hanged.[12]

Another servant who had participated in the murder of his master was similarly mutilated, tortured to death and then his body was hanged. In the brutal way in which they murdered their master, these slaves displayed a savagery equal to that of any of their contemporaries. The master, accompanied by two Saxon servants, whom he had often beaten and abused and thereby won their hatred, was travelling on horseback through a wood. One of the servants hurled his lance at the master, who was riding ahead, striking him in the back and throwing him to the ground. The other servant came up to where the man was lying and hacked him about the head with his spear until he was dead. Both servants fled, taking with them a large sum of money that the master had had on his person and leaving the man lying dead in the road. Only one of the murderers was captured and he was brought in bonds to Tours where he was tortured to death.[13]

Such cases were not exceptional among the Merovingians but were looked upon as fitting punishments for acts of insubordination on the part of their servants. Physical fear was the only law they knew and all of them, masters and servants alike, met violence with violence. There were very few who had any scruples in this respect.

2. Foreign Wars and Invasions

During the sixth century, there were various occasions during which this general violence and roughness was especially in evidence

and, whereas no one was exempt from suffering during any national or even local crisis, it was the poor who were most exposed.

The effects of this spirit of violence and roughness on the poor were very difficult to combat when an army invaded or even passed through a region. At such times the inhabitants of the country districts in particular were exposed to all sorts of acts of violence and not only against their possessions but against their persons as well. Their crops and herds were destroyed, their homes were burned, and they themselves were often killed.

Even after most of Gaul had been brought under the domination of the descendants of Clovis, the country was, upon various occasions, ravaged by foreign invaders. The fact that these invasions were always successfully repulsed did not lessen for the poor inhabitants the hardships and suffering which were always attendant upon such expeditions and which usually left them destitute and starving.

Brief reference has previously been made to the action of Mummolus in attempting to protect the Burgundians from the Saxons while the latter were passing through the country. Although the Saxons had not entered as foreign invaders but had been granted passage through Burgundy on their way to their former homes in Sigibert's kingdom, they conducted themselves as though they had been in the country of an enemy. It was just harvest time when they arrived and the crops were all in the open fields, ready to be gathered in. The Saxons took everything. They collected and ground the grain and ate it, destroyed the herds, burned the houses, cut down the olive trees and destroyed the vines. Mummolus appeared with his army and refused to let them cross the Rhône into Sigibert's kingdom until they had made restitution to the inhabitants whom they had robbed of everything, even of their food supply. So they produced coins made to look like gold but which proved to be only gilded and with these they made payment for the damage they had done. Before the fraud was discovered, the Saxons had passed out of the country and, in spite of Mummolus' efforts to protect them, the poor inhabitants of this region were left ruined.[14]

Sometimes although the efforts to protect the inhabitants from the invaders resulted in routing these latter, the damage was done before the arrival of help and the poor people suffered just the same. This was the case when the province of Arles was invaded by the Lombards in 574. The Lombards laid waste the country between Arles and Marseilles, killing both the inhabitants and the cattle. Mummolus came to their assistance and annihilated the forces of the invaders so completely that only a few managed to

return to Italy. He also made them abandon all their plunder but could not restore the property which had been destroyed.[15]

Neither the Church nor the civil and military authorities were able to protect the inhabitants of the region around Rennes and Nantes from frequent pillage and even captivity. The Bretons, who were still unsubdued at the end of the sixth century,[16] again and again made raids on the territory around these cities, burning property, destroying crops and herds, and taking the inhabitants captive. King Guntram sent Duke Beppolen against them but he succeeded only in driving them on to still greater depredations by ravaging various portions of Breton territory.[17] In 579 following one of their raids during which they carried off a large number of captives and a great quantity of plunder from the region surrounding Rennes and Nantes, Bishop Felix of Nantes sent envoys to them who succeeded in extracting their promise to cease these raids. The promise was made but it was not kept.[18] Later, during the reign of Chlothar II, Chilperic's son, the Bretons made another destructive raid on this same territory. King Guntram as Chlothar's guardian prepared to send an army against them but first gave them a chance to make amends. They paid a fine and pledged themselves never again to invade this district but immediately afterwards they seized the vineyards around Nantes, made the wine and took it away with them.[19] In spite of their fines and promises, the Bretons made still another incursion into these same districts of Nantes and Rennes. The army sent against them under two dukes, Beppolen and Ebrachar, acted in typical Merovingian fashion, first burning, murdering, pillaging and committing all sorts of outrages in its own country before it finally passed over into the country of the enemy. The Bretons were defeated and the Franks set out to return to their own country. There was a large number of poor people who had accompanied the army and these, together with the weak among their own number, the Frank army abandoned at the Vilaine river in the country of the enemy. The presence of these poor people with the army is interesting. It is possible that they had accompanied it in the hope of sharing in the plunder which was sure to be a part of such an expedition. These people were now attacked and captured by Waroch, king of the Bretons, who thus ignored the terms of peace which he had just concluded with Ebrachar. Any of them who offered resistance were killed outright. As for those who succeeded in getting across the river into Frank territory, they found themselves confronted with a new menace. They were afraid to return home the way they had come for fear of being attacked by the inhabitants whose property they had destroyed on the way. They took another route

but even so, those who came first were seized, stripped and beaten by the people of the country. The rest of the army proceeded on its way home through the territory of Tours, burning, pillaging and destroying as they went, since the inhabitants of that region had not expected them to come that way and were taken by surprise.[20]

The effect on the poor inhabitants of the country districts of King Guntram's desire to take Septimania away from the Visigoths was even worse than that caused by the Bretons. The destruction and general havoc wrought by the soldiers wherever they passed was typical of the conduct of a Merovingian army on the march. Voicing much the same sentiments as those expressed by his ancestor Clovis, namely, that it was a shame to allow the Arian Visigoths to occupy a part of Gaul,[21] Guntram mobilized (in the year 585) the whole military strength of his kingdom for this expedition.[22] Gregory of Tours states that two separate armies were mobilized, one comprising the people who lived beyond the Saône, the Rhône and the Seine who joined forces with the Burgundians and the other army recruited from other parts of Guntram's own kingdom, from Bourges, Saintes, Périgueux and Angoulême. The former ravaged the land in the valley of the Saône and the Rhône, destroying crops and herds and not even sparing the churches from their depredations.[23] Spreading desolation, murdering and destroying even in Guntram's own kingdom, this army advanced on Nîmes. The second army in the same manner, pillaging and slaying as they went, advanced towards Carcassonne. On their return journey, however, those who escaped the ambushes of the Goths were seized and beaten by the inhabitants of Toulouse, whose territory the army had devastated before.[24] As for the army which had attacked Nîmes, they were unable to capture the city so they contented themselves with destroying all houses, crops, olive groves and vineyards in the surrounding region. On their homeward journey, this army suffered even worse hardships than had that which had returned home by way of Toulouse. As they passed through Provence, they found that they had destroyed everything so completely on their former passage that now they could find nothing to eat for themselves. Many of them died of hunger and were left lying along the road, many others were drowned in attempting to cross rivers and still many others were killed by the poor inhabitants who were the real sufferers and whose property the army had so completely destroyed. Those that survived continued to pillage and steal anything that had by chance escaped them before, all along the way, even stripping of their plate those churches in Auvergne which happened to be situated near their line of march.[25]

This resistance by the peasants and their attempts to avenge the outrages committed by the Merovingian armies in their passages through Gaul is especially interesting in view of the tradition of popular uprising established several centuries earlier by the "Bagaudae" and also later by the "Vargi". Whereas these were organized bands of the populace which had been driven to outlaw acts in self-defense by the conditions of the time, the peasants of the sixth century were not organized and only retaliated when the opportunity presented itself. Nevertheless it shows that the independent spirit of the French peasants, which moved them to organize these instruments of self-protection, had not been crushed by the overwhelming hardships brought about by the barbarian invasions.[26]

It was the poor inhabitants who had to pay for this expedition of Guntram the following year when, in retaliation for the damage done by the Franks in Septimania, the Goths invaded the province of Arles. They pillaged everything and carried large numbers of the inhabitants off captive. They also pillaged and sacked the fortified town of Ugernum, identified as the site of the modern town of Beaucaire.[27] In addition to the Goths, the Gascons descended from the mountains and ravaged the plains, destroying crops, vineyards, flocks and herds and carrying off many of the inhabitants captive.[28]

Just as the poor and defenseless inhabitants of the kingdoms of Neustria and Burgundy were robbed and murdered by the Merovingian armies, those living under the authority of Childebert II. in Austrasia suffered the same fate and the problem of their protection was equally difficult. Upon the occasion of Childebert's expedition against the Lombards, the inhabitants of his own kingdom were treated by his army just as though they had been in enemy territory. One force under the leadership of two dukes, Audovald and Wintrio, committed so many murderous acts that, as Gregory of Tours remarks, anyone would think that they were leading a hostile army against the place instead of just passing through their own country. The other portions of Childebert's army acted in the same way, first ravaging their own country before proceeding against the enemy.[29]

3. Quarrels Between Kings

The frequent civil wars which were waged between the various Merovingian kings created the same difficulties in protecting the weak and defenseless inhabitants and caused the same widespread destruction throughout Gaul as did any invasion of a foreign people. In these wars, as was the case with their expeditions against foreign nations, the descendants of Clovis ravaged parts of their

own country as relentlessly as they ravaged the countries of their enemies. In fact, in order to punish some particular district for having surrendered to a rival, the Merovingian kings would sometimes deliberately abandon a whole region to their soldiers, with unlimited freedom to plunder at will. At such times, the chief sufferers were as usual the small proprietors and poor inhabitants of the country districts who were not responsible for the decisions regarding the allegiance of the district, usually made by the bishops and the local counts and other officials in the towns.

This is the manner in which Theuderic, one of the sons of Clovis undertook to punish Auvergne for having invited King Childebert to take possession of the province when it was rumored in Clermont that King Theuderic had been killed during his campaign in Thuringia. His brothers, Chlothar and Childebert, determined to attack Burgundy and invited Theuderic to join them in this campaign. When he refused his soldiers rebelled and threatened to desert him and follow his brothers without him. He deterred them from doing this by promising them to lead them into Auvergne, which was a part of his own kingdom, where they would find great quantities of gold, silver, garments, herds and slaves. He told them they could carry back with them not only all of the plunder of the region but even the people as well[30]. So his army overran Auvergne, pillaging and destroying everything in its path and not even sparing the possessions of the poor which had been brought together in the church of Saint Julian for safe keeping.[31] This pillaging of the church of Saint Julian will be referred to in another connection.

Incidentally, the use of the churches in country districts as granaries or storehouses for hay was not uncommon in sixth-century Gaul and, in times of war and invasions, it was customary for the people to deposit in the churches their movable property in the hope that the sanctity of the place would protect it from the invaders. This is one way in which the Church strove to protect its dependents from the consequences of invasion and also evidence of the reliance of the people on the Church in times of great emergency.

Among other places captured by Theuderic in this invasion of Auvergne was the stronghold of Vollore[32] which up to that time had never been taken by an enemy. It was taken by Theuderic, according to Gregory of Tours, through the treachery of a slave of the priest, Proculus. When the besiegers entered the town they killed Proculus at the altar, laid waste the whole place and led the population away captive.[33]

Vengeance for lack of loyalty was also taken upon the Thuringians by King Chlothar. In 555 the Saxons revolted against Frank-

ish domination and, in putting down the revolt, Chlothar destroyed the greater part of them. Then, as a punishment for having aided the Saxons, he invaded and ravaged the whole of Thuringia, his own territory.[34]

The effort made by Chilperic to prevent Sigibert from punishing the inhabitants of territory taken from him for changing their allegiance to their new conquerors has already been mentioned.[35] Apparently Chilperic assumed that, according to customary procedure, such punishment would be inflicted as a matter of course. Mention has also been made of the destruction wrought in the vicinity of Paris by Sigibert's barbarian mercenaries from across the Rhine.[36] The people living in the little villages and on their small properties in this region not only had their homes burned and all of their possessions plundered, but they themselves were led away captive by the Germans.

Those who survived this expedition barely escaped even worse destruction of their lives and property a year later, as did also the inhabitants of the cities from Rouen to Paris, when Chilperic and Guntram united against Sigibert. Chilperic invaded Sigibert's territory as far as Rheims, burning and destroying everything in the path of his army. Again Sigibert summoned the pagan Germans from beyond the Rhine and advanced with them as far as Rouen. The whole district lying between Rouen and Paris was to be turned over to them for plunder as their reward for coming to his assistance. Such an idea was too revolting even to the Neustrian soldiers, and so Sigibert was prevented by his own men from carrying out these plans.[37] This fact is especially interesting inasmuch as the desire for plunder and the capacity for cruelty of the Merovingian soldiers seem generally to have been insatiable and when they forced their will on their leaders, it was usually in the other direction.

The poor inhabitants of Auvergne had their property and possessions destroyed and pillaged again by Guntram's troops under Mummolus,[38] in the war between Guntram and Chilperic. By way of retaliation, Chilperic's army invaded and ravaged the territory of Tours, not even sparing the property belonging to the church of Saint Martin.[39] The territory around Bourges was subjected to especially cruel devastation by the armies of Chilperic. They not only destroyed everything in sight, houses, vineyards, and crops, but they even plundered the churches, carrying off the sacred vessels and then burning the church buildings. Guntram arrived on the scene with his army and destroyed most of Chilperic's forces, after which the two kings made peace and agreed to pay each other composition or fine for the damage done. Even after

peace had been declared, Chilperic was unable to keep his men from plundering so he abandoned all his booty, set his prisoners free and returned to Paris, leaving his army to disband. When the army received the order to return home, they carried off with them so much plunder that the whole region was left desolate. To add to the hardships of the inhabitants of the district, this invasion was followed by a disease among the cattle which destroyed what was left of their herds so that, as Gregory says, it was a rare thing to see a horse or any cattle.[40]

At the time of the death of Chilperic in 584, Tours and Poitiers were under his rule. The people of these cities wanted to pass under the rule of Sigibert's son, Childebert, but King Guntram forced them to take an oath of allegiance to him. This started another period of suffering for the common people, especially for the poor inhabitants of the country districts. Guntram levied an army in his territory of Bourges and began an invasion of the region around Tours, burning everything as he advanced. When they saw that their whole territory was about to be thus destroyed, the people of Tours decided to submit to Guntram rather than to suffer the consequences of invasion.[41]

As the people of Poitiers preferred to remain under Childebert, some of whose forces were already in the city, Guntram raised two armies to send against them, one in Tours and the other in Bourges. These two armies advanced toward Poitiers from the two directions, laying waste the country as they went. Seeing their houses and all their possessions being thus destroyed by fire and pillage, the people of Poitiers were forced to take the oath of allegiance to Guntram.[42]

For a time it appeared that the poor inhabitants of the territory of Poitiers were not going to be subjected to the horrors of invasion, but not for long. Poitiers broke its oath of loyalty to Guntram, who levied an enormous army and sent it against the city. First, the enemy sent envoys to inquire whether or not the citizens wished to admit them peaceably but these envoys were badly received by Maroveus, the bishop of Poitiers. This participation of the bishop in important civic affairs is interesting as evidence of the extremely important rôle which the Church had come to play in the life of the people, even in temporal and political affairs. Upon Maroveus' rejection of the envoys, the troops proceeded with the devastation of the country and began to pillage and burn the property and kill the inhabitants. On their way back, they crossed the territory of Tours which, although part of Guntram's territory, was treated likewise, even the churches being pillaged and burned. After several such invasions of their territory had been made and

the people of Poitiers saw that most of the region around the city had been thus ravaged, they admitted the army into the city itself. The manner in which Maroveus, bishop of Poitiers, ransomed himself as well as the citizens by having a gold chalice made into coins has already been mentioned.[43]

Another period of war with its attendant destruction of life, devastation of property and sack of cities was brought on by the advent of the pretender Gundovald who, by the way, appears to have been an artisan and earned his living by painting.[44] As usual, the poor inhabitants were the chief sufferers. The use of churches in sixth-century Gaul as storehouses for the possessions of the inhabitants in time of war has already been mentioned. In the expedition of Guntram's army against Gundovald, we have another example of the failure of this protective measure against the ruthless Merovingian soldiers. In advancing toward the siege of Convenae, (now Saint Bertrand de Comminges), the Burgundian army came to the church of Saint Vincent near the city of Agen. Here the poor inhabitants had collected all their movable possessions in the hope that the sanctity of the church would save them from destruction, but in vain. The invaders, finding the doors of the church locked, burned them down and carried off everything which had been stored inside, even including the church plate. Arriving before Convenae, they ravaged all the surrounding territory. Here, however, as sometimes happened when the occasion presented itself, the inhabitants were moved to reprisals against the marauding soldiers. Some of King Guntram's soldiers wandered too far from their comrades and these were seized and put to death by the peasants in revenge for the damage done to their property by the Burgundian army.[45]

4. Quarrels Between Cities

This wholesale destruction of entire regions was not always the result of wars between the Merovingian kings nor with foreign invaders. Enmity and feuds between cities also appear to have existed and to have found expression in deeds of violence as intense as any perpetrated by an invading army. After the death of Chilperic, the men of the cities of Orleans and Blois attacked the region of Châteaudun, burning the houses and crops which could not be carried off and driving away all the flocks and herds. After they had gone, the men of Châteaudun, with other inhabitants of the territory around Chartres followed them and devastated their lands in the same way. As this feud between the cities threatened to continue, the counts interfered and imposed a truce until the

side guilty of starting the affair could be determined and a composition imposed upon them.[46]

The inhabitants of neighboring regions sometimes exhibited the same spirit of animosity toward each other, and an invading army was followed by inhabitants from regions near by. These latter, instead of sympathizing with their unfortunate neighbors, followed along after the army in the hope of sharing in the spoils of the invasion. If the poor inhabitants themselves were guilty of such deeds of violence against their neighbors, the task which faced the Church of protecting them all as a class from the naturally less sympathetic rich must have appeared almost a hopeless one.

We have already remarked the large crowd of poor people who accompanied the expedition which King Guntram sent against the Bretons. Similarly, a number of inhabitants from the territory of Tours had followed Guntram's army sent to subdue the city of Poitiers. After the departure of the army from the city, whence they departed in pursuit of the pretender Gundovald, there were left behind many inhabitants from Tours who had followed in the hope of sharing in the plunder of the region. These the inhabitants of Poitiers now fell upon and stripped of all that they had accumulated during the expedition. Many of them were killed and the rest were driven out of the territory.[47]

5. Abuse of Power

Still another element which contributed largely to the difficulties encountered by those wishing to protect the poor and weak portion of the population from the abuse and suffering to which they were constantly exposed during this violent age was the unscrupulousness of certain individuals and persons in authority who abused their power and privileges to make the lot of the poor man even less bearable. In the *Historia Francorum,* Gregory of Tours describes many events typical of the society of which he writes in which the poor and the weak were cruelly dealt with and where, in fact, they were treated more like the refuse of society than a part of it.

For example, when provisions were found to be running short, the common people were sometimes expelled from a besieged city in the face of the enemy, of whose tender mercies only the worst might be expected. Thus, during the siege of the city of Vienne in the early part of the sixth century, finding that their food supplies were running low and fearing that a real famine might result, Godigisel ordered all the common people driven out of the city. Among those thus expelled was a workman who betrayed the en-

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trance to the city to the besieging army and who thus sought to avenge the treatment which he and his comrades had received.[48]

The same attitude toward the common people in the city of Convenae was shown by the pretender Gundovald, when that city was besieged by Guntram's forces. He first exhorted the people to resist Guntram's army and, bidding them sally forth to meet the enemy, he shut the gates behind them and the bishop with them, leaving them to their fate.[49] This act of Gundovald's was even worse than that of Godigisel because Gundovald sent them out of their own city in his defense, whereas Godigisel had made no such pretense.

By way of attenuation, however, it might be remarked that these deeds were committed in time of war and in critical emergencies created by war. Nevertheless the fact remains that when some of the people had to suffer, the lower class, that is the poor, were the ones who were made the victims.

One striking example of disregard manifested for the rights of the lower classes is to be found in Gregory's account of the preparations and journey of the princess Rigunth, the daughter of Fredegundis and Chilperic, who was to be sent to Spain to marry the Visigothic king, Recared. Chilperic collected great quantities of serfs from the various royal estates and carried them off in wagons to Paris, where the princess' retinue was being formed. Many of these poor people, seeing themselves thus torn from their families and friends, wept and were unwilling to go, so Chilperic had them imprisoned in order to be able to send them more easily. Some of them hanged themselves in desperation, unable to contemplate life away from their families and friends. Even in the sixth century, the traditional attachment of the French to their homes was apparently a strong sentiment with them. Not only the poor but some people from the upper classes were also chosen to accompany Rigunth. These made their wills, many leaving their property to the churches, since they would henceforth be the same as dead as far as their families and homes were concerned. The poor inhabitants of the regions through which this immense cortège passed were made to bear the burden of furnishing it with the necessary supplies. In order to protect from attack the treasure Rigunth was taking with her, Chilperic sent an army along with her to act as escort. This army also lived off the country through which it passed and naturally added greatly to the burden of the inhabitants. In addition, this whole procession robbed and plundered all along the way. Gregory says that they pillaged the cottages of the poor, ruined the vineyards, drove off all the flocks and herds they came across and took anything they saw that they wanted. The

country through which they passed was left denuded of all provisions. The journey ended abruptly at Toulouse when word was received of Chilperic's death.[50]

Eberulf, who was killed in the church of Saint Martin by the envoy of King Guntram, was a typical example of the unscrupulous noble who ruthlessly destroyed the property of the poor. He had often let loose his horses and cattle to graze on the crops of the poor and if these latter, protecting their property, attempted to drive them out they were killed by Eberulf's men.[51]

Gregory's account of the misdeeds of Chuppa, formerly count of the stables of King Chilperic, will give some idea of the sort of behavior which was typical of the more unscrupulous of the Merovingian nobles as well as with what impunity the rich could commit depredations against the possessions of the poor inhabitants and escape punishment.

Chuppa made a raid in the territory of Tours in true bandit fashion, carrying off herds and anything else he could lay hands on. The inhabitants pursued him and he escaped only by abandoning all of his plunder. Two of his followers were killed and two were captured, and these latter were brought before the king for questioning. Here it was revealed that Chuppa had managed his escape through the aid of the count's judicial representative, a man named Animodus. Chuppa and Animodus were arrested and brought before the king's court to be tried. Although this show of the enforcement of law and order was made, both Chuppa and Animodus were found "not guilty" by the court and were dismissed after having bribed the *domesticus,* a ranking official.[52]

In addition to the difficulties in protecting the poor presented by the frequent passage of armies through the country, the custom of large retinues and escorts, such as that of Rigunth, of living off the country through which they passed and the corruptness of officials which enabled the unscrupulous rich to plunder the possessions of the defenseless peasants at will, the innate cruelty of certain individuals toward those over whom they had jurisdiction, kept the representatives of the Church constantly on the alert to exercise its authority and privileges whenever possible in behalf of these poor people, for whom the Church was the only possible source of protection.

The manner in which Fredegundis treated the servants who had been attached to Rigunth's suite is typical of the general treatment accorded to this class. Upon receipt of news of how the princess had been robbed and abandoned by her escort when they heard that King Chilperic was dead, Fredegundis had the cooks, bakers and other servants connected with the expedition beaten,

stripped and put in handcuffs in spite of the fact that they were not the guilty persons.[53] They were merely something on which she could vent her rage.

Fredegundis' treatment of one of her servants when she needed a victim on whom to throw suspicion after the murder of Bishop Praetextatus is also typical of her who, in turn, typified her epoch. The bishop was stabbed while conducting services in his church at Rouen and Fredegundis realized that she would have to do something to divert suspicion from herself. Consequently, she had a servant seized and beaten for the murder and then handed him over to the bishop's nephew to be tortured. Under torture, the man admitted having committed the murder but said he had done so at the instigation of Queen Fredegundis herself, who had given him a sum of money and had promised to enfranchise him and his wife.[54]

The possibility of slaves being made to bear the blame for some crime for the want of better victims is also suggested by the refusal of King Childebert to receive the twelve men whom the emperor Maurice delivered to him, loaded with chains, as being those who had murdered his envoys. He declined to receive them without proof that they were really the guilty men, saying that for all he knew they might be innocent persons or even some one's slaves.[55]

One who was especially cruel toward his servants was Duke Rauching. When a servant held a lighted candle before him as he sat at dinner, he made the man hold the candle between his bared shins until it burned out. He then had a second candle lighted and so on until the servant's legs were burned to the bone. If the man uttered a sound or moved, he was threatened with a sword. Meanwhile Rauching sat and ate his dinner and exulted over the man's suffering.[56]

Rauching was also the perpetrator of another piece of notable cruelty. Two of his serfs ran away and took refuge in the church, where they were married. As soon as Duke Rauching heard about it, he went to the church and demanded that the priest hand them over to him. This the priest refused to do unless Rauching would first promise that the servants would not be separated and also that they would not be punished. Rauching considered the matter for a moment and then, turning and placing his hands on the altar, he took an oath that the two serfs would not only never be separated by him but that, on the contrary, he would see to it that they always remained together. Upon his taking this oath the priest handed over to him the two serfs who had been protected from their master's wrath by the right of sanctuary extended by the Church.

But the work of the Church in behalf of these two servants was not yet done. Rauching took them home and proceeded immediately to carry out his oath. He had a tree cut down and hollowed out. In it he placed the two servants and then had the whole thing, the tree with the man and woman in it, buried in a deep pit in the ground. In this way he kept his oath that they would never be separated. The priest heard about what had been done and hastened to rescue them. The man was taken out alive but the girl was found suffocated.[57]

6. Famine

Still another condition which added greatly to the difficulties in protecting the poor from the state of misery to which their poverty condemned them was the frequency and severity of the famines which, from time to time, devastated Gaul. Reference has already been made to the famine in the fifth century during which both Ecdicius and Bishop Patiens showed such great charity in caring for thousands of the poor who otherwise would have died of starvation. In view of the frequent and thorough destruction of crops, vineyards, olive groves as well as flocks and herds in various parts of Gaul during the numerous military ventures of the Merovingian kings and also the raids made by hostile nations such as the Visigoths, Lombards, Saxons, and Bretons, all mentioned above, the existence of famine in sixth-century Gaul is not surprising. Gregory of Tours mentions a great famine which ravaged almost all of Gaul near the end of the sixth century, following the death of King Chilperic, which occurred in 584, during which many of the poor sold themselves into slavery in return for a little food. Multitudes of people were reduced to using ground grape seeds and roots and even corn stalks which they mixed with a little flour in making bread. Others, who had no flour at all, picked grass and ate it, whereupon they died. The merchants took advantage of the general food shortage to raise their prices to exorbitant levels.[58]

From the preceding references, it appears that in spite of the powerful and determined protection of the poor by the various agencies of the Church, as well as by occasional kindly disposed individuals of the upper class, a general lack of restraint and roughness characterized the period and presented great difficulties and obstacles to this protection. There were many individuals who were undeterred by anything when they wished to punish or mistreat the weak and the poor. While there were some who gave liberally of their wealth to relieve the suffering of this class and also sought to restrain those under them from violent deeds, as has been mentioned above, there were also others who victimized, robbed, and

even tortured them cruelly when the occasion arose, due to the inability of the poor to offer effective resistance.

However, there was still another and even more powerful agency of protection for the poor as a class which many times stayed the hand of even the most unscrupulous of them all and did more to counterbalance the natural cruelty and injustice of the period toward the poor and the weak than all the other agencies of protection combined. This agency, purely a psychological one, was the mystical connection which grew up in the minds of the society of the period between the poor people and the saints.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTICAL POWER OF THE SAINTS AND OF THE POOR

I. The Saints

One of the most striking characteristics of the writings of Gregory of Tours and one by which he most truly typifies his period is the preponderance of the mystical or supernatural element. By the sixth century, the cult of the saints, which had been developing since the early centuries of Christianity, had attained a large place in the lives of the whole people and the number of persons so revered was very large. Each place had its own particular one whose protection was made evident in various ways, especially by miracles accomplished at his tomb, but the great saint of the Merovingians was Saint Martin of Tours, who lived in the fourth century.

The people loved the saints and wanted to know all the minute details of their lives. What the hagiographs did not know, they invented or adapted from the lives of others. Popular tradition made of the saint venerated in a particular region a real hero and demanded that he have a part in all the important events that had taken place.[1] Their popularity is illustrated in the life of Saint Rusticula, in which the hagiograph describes the welcome accorded her by the citizens after an absence. When the people heard that she was approaching the city, they all flocked out to meet her, people of all ages and sexes, those connected with the Church as well as the laity, nobles and common people, rich and poor, natives and strangers, all rejoiced and gave thanks to God that she was being returned to them.[2]

Inversely, for their part, the saints performed deeds of loving charity towards their followers. We read in the life of Saint Radegund, who left King Chlothar to found her convent at Poitiers, how she was accustomed to gather together the poor on Sundays and wash them with her own hands, applying healing ointment to their sores, and then would feed them with the most delicate foods.[3]

If a choice was to be made or a preference was to be manifested between historical and legendary material in their task of satisfying the insatiable and avid curiosity of the people concerning the details of the lives of the saints, the hagiographs consistently

chose the latter.[4] Some of these legends illustrating the miraculous deeds supposed to have been performed by the saints show not only the power of the belief in them as miracle workers but also the sort of stories which built up and strengthened this belief. The popular predilection for the marvelous and the extraordinary element in such stories is especially manifest in those which describe the deliverance of prisoners.

1. *Power of the Belief and Legends Contributing to It*

Saint Columbanus is credited with having accomplished an especially marvelous deliverance of prisoners by his biographer and disciple, the monk Jonas of Bobbio. Columbanus had been expelled from the city of Vesontione (Besançon) by the king's representative, a man named Baudulfus, but he had remained near at hand. While there, he heard that the prison was filled with men who had been condemned to death and were awaiting execution. Columbanus hastened to these men, entering the prison without hindrance, and brought them the word of God. They promised him that if they were liberated, they would mend their ways and would also do penance for the crimes which they had committed. Columbanus then sent for the man who had affixed the manacles on their hands and feet and ordered him to remove them. He himself washed their feet and wiped them with a linen cloth and then commanded them to seek the church where they were to do penance for their crimes and wash away their sins with their tears. This they hastened to do. Meanwhile, the military tribune had seen that his prisoners had been miraculously released from their fetters and his prison was standing empty, so gathering his soldiers, he set out to pursue them. The prisoners looked back and saw the soldiers drawing nearer and nearer, and, ahead of them, the doors of the church barred against them. They besought Columbanus to save them. The saint raised his face and prayed to God that since by His virtue the prisoners had been snatched from their shackles, He not suffer that they be handed back to their former captors to be again imprisoned. Instantly the doors of the church swung open and the prisoners entered, the doors closing behind them before the very eyes of the soldiers, just as though a human hand had opened them and then had closed and locked them with a key. The tribune called for the turnkey who came hurrying up and, upon examining the doors, said that never had he found them locked more securely. Afterwards, no one dared to attempt to harm any of those who had been thus freed by divine grace.[5]

Still more miraculous things were accomplished by Saint Winebaud, the Abbot, according to the hagiograph who was responsible

for the story of his life. The saint arrived in the town of Alentum, not far from the city of Rothomagensis (Rouen), where the king happened to be. When he saw the king, he rejoiced in his good fortune in finding him there. Like an angel of God, he immediately took up his heavenly duty and asked the king to see that all those who were confined by the dukes or the counts in their pits and prisons were released immediately, in the name of the saints and for the sake of the good of the kingdom. His request was immediately granted and he went on his way to Paris. Anxious to visit the prisoners there, Winebaud dispatched a priest who was with him to investigate and find out whether the prison was guarded. The priest came back with the news that Winebaud's arrival had been discovered and that the soldiers guarding the prisoners had secured all locks and bars and then had fled. This did not disturb Winebaud, who told the priest not to worry because the place would be delivered into their hands through prayer. He accordingly began to pray and soon the walls of the prison fell down, miraculously breaking the stocks and fetters but without doing any harm to the prisoners themselves. Winebaud and his companion then hastened to free those who had been incarcerated between rocks. These wretches were so weakened from hunger and from thirst that they could not move the debris around them and their limbs refused to support them. The saint brought them food and drink and then with his own hands he washed them one by one, cut their hair which had remained unshorn for a long time, replaced their dirty rags with new clothing which he bought for them and then said: "See, my little sons, you have deserved divine pardon. Go without fear to your homes".[6]

The mere presence of relics in the neighborhood was often credited with the power to make chains drop off, prison doors to open and guards to flee in fright. In such stories, the judges were usually so impressed with the manifestation of the saints' wishes that they did not dare molest any prisoners who had been thus miraculously set free.

One such miraculous delivery is described by Gregory of Tours as having been made upon the occasion of the conversion of the King of Galicia, to whom relics of Saint Martin were being carried. Some prisoners heard the chanting of psalms and, wondering at the unusual sweetness of the tones, inquired of their guards what was taking place. Upon being told that they were carrying relics of Saint Martin to the King of Galicia, the prisoners burst into tears and implored Saint Martin to come to their aid and deliver them. Suddenly their chains dropped off, their guards fled and they issued from the prison without hindrance. Before everybody, they

prostrated themselves in front of the relics, weeping and praying for absolution. Upon the intercession of the bishop in their behalf, the judge pardoned them and they were permitted to go on their way unmolested.[7]

The same miraculous power was credited with having freed four men from prison, a few days after the celebration of Saint Martin's feast held in the summer. They were kept closely guarded and no one was permitted even to bring them any food. Their feet were fastened in stocks and they were also held by chains. They prayed to Saint Martin imploring his aid and, while they were still praying, the stocks which held their feet broke and their chains fell off. They hastened to the door, which mysteriously swung open before them, and took refuge in the church of Saint Martin without being stopped or challenged by anyone. Their guards saw them but were so overcome with amazement at the miracle which they were witnessing that they did not even call after them but took refuge with them in the church.[8]

Still another miracle was shown to some prisoners following the celebration of Saint Martin's feast. These men were also miraculously freed from their prison and permitted to reach the basilica of the saint and were consequently freed by the judge.[9]

This same power was responsible for the dismissal of charges against a citizen of Tours, the judge fearing to oppose the saint's will after it had been made manifest. The man had been condemned to prison and was being taken from the one in which he had been originally confined to another prison situated across the Loire. He was chained by the neck and his hands were tied behind his back. They had reached the bank of the river and were waiting for the boat which was to take them across. In the meantime, the prisoner had been ceaselessly calling upon Saint Martin to come to his aid. Suddenly, his guards felt something strike them on the head and they fell to the ground, while at the same time the man's chains fell off and his hands were freed. Realizing that for the moment he was free, he fled while his guards were still lying on the ground and reached the sanctuary of Saint Martin's church. The judge dismissed the charges against him. At the same time some prisoners in the city of Poitiers who had been thrown into the slaves' prison were miraculously set free.[10]

Similarly, Saint Martin loosed the bonds of some guilty prisoners chained and fastened in stocks in the slaves' prison, permitting them to escape and take sanctuary in his church. Their freedom was likewise granted by the judge.[11] Thus the saint extended his protection not only to those who were innocent of the crimes of which they were accused, but to guilty persons as well.

The mere fact that they were in distress and called upon his help made them deserving of receiving it.

A young girl whose parents were freedmen was claimed as a slave by the son of the former master of her family. She rebelled against this injustice and refused to do any work, so she was chained and put in prison. As she lay there weeping because she could not attend the feast of Saint Martin, the stocks which held her feet suddenly fell apart and she was able to move, although her chains were still on her. Dragging them behind her, she fled from the prison and reached the basilica of the saint. No sooner had her feet touched the threshold of the church than the chains broke and fell from her neck.[12]

Another class of prisoners in whose behalf the power of Saint Martin made itself evident was that of people imprisoned for debt. Debt was a crime punishable by imprisonment, during which the debtor was at the mercy of his creditor, as will appear. Even in the fifth century the Church itself discountenanced debtors, as we find the council held in 450 under Saint Patrick issuing a canon directed against debtors and providing that if anyone should refuse to pay what he owed, he should be deprived of communion until he had settled the debt.[13] In the sixth century, however, we find Saint Martin performing miracles for their benefit and thus extending to them the protection of his power.

One case of this kind cited by Gregory of Tours is the following. A certain man was summoned to pay a debt which he had contracted in a moment of great need and, as he was unable to discharge this obligation, he was thrown into prison. His creditor saw that the man had nothing and no charitable person was likely to come to his assistance, so he vented his spite by having the man chained even more heavily and also deprived him of all food and drink, telling him that he would make an example of him for the benefit of the rest of the world until he paid what he owed. Meanwhile some relics of Saint Martin were being carried to Soissons and on the way they crossed the square near the prison. The prisoner heard the chanting and prayed that Saint Martin might have pity on him. Immediately his bonds fell off and he escaped into the basilica of the saint. He was later ransomed by some pious persons and thus acquitted of the debt.[14]

Saint Germanus, bishop of Paris, who died in 576 showed his power even during his own funeral procession, and out of respect for what was interpreted as the saint's expressed wish, some prisoners were set free. As the saint's body was being carried to the tomb, some prisoners in the street called upon his name. Immediately the body grew very heavy. The prisoners were set free and those

carrying the body of the saint found that they could again lift it without difficulty. The prisoners who had been released joined in the funeral procession and followed the body of their benefactor to the church where he was to be buried.[15]

Germanus' power was also believed to have saved from death some prisoners who were in the prison in Paris when the city was partly destroyed by fire. Germanus appeared before them, broke their chains, opened the door and permitted them to make their escape to the church of Saint Vincent, where Germanus' tomb was located.[16]

By virtue of all of these legends in which the mystic power of the saints is the important factor, the belief in this power was deepened and the importance of the saints' influence thus increased.

Gregory of Tours not only relates legendary stories generally current in his time but he also tells about various circumstances in which this mystic power of the saints appeared which, in turn, had been told to him by persons claiming to have actually been involved in the miracle in question or had seen and talked with those in whose behalf the saints had acted.

The following remarkable story of his own experience was told to Gregory by the priest, Wilicharius, who affirmed that it had all taken place in the presence of a crowd of witnesses. During the quarrel of King Chlothar with his son Chramn, Wilicharius had incurred the anger of the king and had fled to take refuge in the basilica of Saint Martin at Tours, where he was kept in irons. Through the miraculous power of the saint, the irons fell off and Wilicharius found himself free. Through some misfortune he was recaptured outside of the atrium of the church and the chains were put back on him, his hands tied behind his back and thus bound, he was led before Chlothar. Wilicharius began to lament loudly, praying to Saint Martin not to permit one who had fled to him for protection to be thus taken captive. His cries were heard by Bishop Eufronius who mounted upon the ramparts of the city opposite the basilica, and prayed in the priest's behalf. Immediately the bonds which held him fell off and every link in the chains with which he was loaded fell apart. Nevertheless, he was taken before Chlothar and again loaded with irons but he again invoked the name of Saint Martin and no sooner had he spoken the saint's name than the irons which held him turned as soft as clay. Chlothar realized that the power of Saint Martin was operating in protecting the prisoner, so he had him set at liberty without any further delay.[17]

Another experience which is described in the *Historia Francorum* as having been had by someone Gregory knew personally is that of the workman, Modestus, who publicly rebuked Riculf for

having spoken against Gregory, his bishop, while the latter was still under suspicion of having slandered Queen Fredegundis. Modestus was arrested, tortured and imprisoned by Fredegundis. He was lying between two guards, chained to a block, but he prayed to the Lord while his guards were sleeping at midnight that the power of Saint Martin might come to his aid and set him free. Soon his chains fell off, the block was broken and the door of the prison was miraculously opened. Modestus himself walked into the church of Saint Médard where Gregory was keeping vigil that night.[18]

Another episode, legendary in character but which was related to Gregory of Tours by the person for whose benefit a miracle was performed, is the following. The bishop of Tours was on his way to see King Childebert. As he was passing through the district of Rheims, he met a man who told him about the deliverance of some prisoners of that city, which had taken place a few days before the feast of Saint Martin, in the sixteenth year of King Childebert, or in 591. The man's own servant had been among those miraculously delivered. The prison where they were confined was covered with heavy planks, nailed down, with huge stones on top of them to hold them even more securely in place. The door was fastened by an iron bolt and also by a lock for which there was a key. In spite of all these precautions, Saint Martin released the prisoners without even opening the door. He removed the roof, broke the chains and stocks which held the prisoners and took them out through the opening in the roof by raising them in the air and saying: "I am Martin, the soldier of Christ. Go in peace and without fear". When Gregory reached King Childebert, he related this story to the king who assured him that it had actually taken place. Some of the prisoners who had thus escaped had come to him and he had released them and also let them go without paying to the royal treasury the fine which was due, called the *fredum*.[19]

So, not only did Gregory's contemporaries have a profound respect for the saints and their great mystic power but they even believed this power to be operating strongly in their own lives and in those of their contemporaries and fellow-citizens.

2. *Mystical Interpretation of Events*

The result of the deep impression which all these legends current in the sixth century had created upon the mentality of the epoch was that all sorts of occurrences, public and private, fortunate as well as unfortunate, were given a mystical interpretation and were seen as rewards or punishments for the acts of men. If a misfortune occurred, the saints' anger had been aroused and the

misfortune was the result of their displeasure; if a piece of good fortune came to anyone, immediately that person was assumed to be enjoying evidence of the good graces of some particular saint.

In his account of the devastation of Auvergne by the army of Theuderic in 532, Gregory tells how Saint Julian showed his displeasure and punished the invaders. Mention has previously been made of the fact that during this invasion of Auvergne, the church of Saint Julian was broken into and plundered of all of the possessions which the poor inhabitants of the region had stored there for safekeeping. Gregory tells us that those who had been guilty of this crime suddenly fell upon each other like madmen and began to cry aloud to Saint Julian, beseeching him to cease tormenting them.[20]

When Theuderic withdrew from Clermont, he left behind him one of his kinsmen, named Sigivald, to protect the town. Sigivald seized possession of a house which had been left to the church of Saint Julian but, as soon as he set foot in it, he lost his mind. His wife had him taken to another domain where he recovered his sanity and when he learned what had occurred, immediately he interpreted his illness as a sign of divine displeasure. He hastened to restore to the church the double of everything that he had taken.[21]

It is to the anger of Saint Martin that Gregory of Tours credits the sudden illness and death of a judge who had prevented a man who was a fugitive in the church at Tours from receiving a drink of water. Duke Astrapius, fleeing from Chramn, the son of King Chlothar, took refuge in the church of Saint Martin. Unable to force him to leave the sanctuary of the church, Chramn decided to starve him out by forbidding anyone to give him food or drink. As the fugitive lay in the church half dead, someone ventured to bring him a drink of water. Astrapius had just taken hold of it and was about to drink when the judge came hurrying up and, snatching the vessel from his hand, poured the water on the ground. This deed, says Gregory, was speedily followed by the vengeance of God and of the holy Saint Martin. That very day the judge was stricken with fever and died in the night. When the people saw what had happened, they hastened to identify themselves as proper followers of the saint. They brought Astrapius everything that he needed, not wishing to suffer the same fate as the judge who had thus defied Saint Martin's power.[22]

Gregory relates another legend concerning the fate which overtook some men who dared to plunder a monastery containing relics of Saint Martin. The monks saw the men preparing to cross the river to attack the monastery and called to them, warning them

that the place contained relics of the famous saint. Hearing this, many of them gave up the undertaking but there were twenty men who neither feared God nor honored Saint Martin. These twenty crossed over to the monastery and pillaged it, piling their loot on board their boat. But the power of the saint was not slow in appearing to punish them. When they pushed out into the river, they found that they could not control the vessel and were carried along helpless. They had lost their oars, so they attempted to use their spears as poles and push the boat to the shore. In the middle of the stream the boat came apart under them and each man was transfixed by his own lance, the point of which he had been holding toward him. The only man who escaped was one who had tried to dissuade them from carrying out their criminal plans. The monks took the bodies from the river and buried them and restored their possessions to the monastery.[23]

This same miraculous power was shown in the way in which Saint Martin protected some property belonging to the women who served the oratory erected at the gate of Amiens in his honor. Someone had given the women several hives of bees. A man decided that he would steal some of these for himself so, under cover of the night, he took three of the hives and put them in his boat. The next morning at daybreak the people hastened to the dock to cross the river and, to their surprise, they saw the man's boat at the bank, the bees escaping in swarms from the hives, and the man lying on the ground a short distance away. The women at the oratory had already made known their loss so, seeing the man lying on the ground, the people thought that they had caught the thief red-handed and hastened toward him to bind him. As they came near him, however, they saw that the saint had already punished him for the theft. He was stone dead. Immediately they informed the women at the oratory of what had happened and returned to them their stolen property, greatly awed by the speed with which the divine vengeance had overtaken the culprit.[24]

Another case where Saint Martin intervened from the tomb to protect his interests is cited by Gregory of Tours in the story concerning a citizen of Poitiers named Eustochius. His relative, Baudulfus, had made the church of Saint Martin his heir, but Eustochius made repeated attempts to get possession of some of this property which had passed into the hands of the Church. Tired of being continually harassed by Eustochius about the matter, the bishop, Eufronius, had finally ceded to him some object from among these possessions. But Saint Martin did not permit this plundering of his property to go unpunished. As Eustochius was taking this object to his home, his only son was suddenly attacked by fever and

died. He was stricken at the very moment when his father took possession of this ill-gotten property and Eustochius was never given another son.[25]

Mention has previously been made of the custom of the *matricularii* of leaving one of their number at the church to receive any gifts that might come to them after the hour when they left their posts for the night. It was the miraculous power of Saint Martin that appeared in behalf of these poor of his church and saved them from being robbed.

One day a devout person brought to the *matricula,* in the hope of being rewarded for his generosity, a small gold coin (*unum triantem mercedis*), which he gave to the guardian whom the *matricularii* had left at the church for the purpose of receiving such gifts. The guardian kept the money for himself, hoping to deceive his fellow members. These had heard, however, that some money had been left for them and asked the man about it. He said that he had only received a silver denier, swearing to the truth of his statement by the holy place itself and by the virtues of Saint Martin. He had scarcely finished speaking when he fell to the ground and had to be carried to his bed. Seeing himself thus stricken by the anger of the saint, he confessed his crime and died, begging those who surrounded him to restore the gold coin to the *matricula.*[26]

The bestowing of alms in the hope of a reward was not uncommon in the sixth century, as will appear later.

Illness and death in the family of a man named Rathar was interpreted as divine punishment for robbing the Church. Rathar had been sent to Marseilles in the quality of duke by King Childebert, in order to investigate King Guntram's charges against Bishop Theodore of Marseilles. Rathar sent the bishop to Guntram in order that he might receive his sentence from the council of bishops to be held at Mâcon. After Theodore's departure from the city, Rathar pillaged the church, taking some things for himself and locking up the rest. But divine vengeance soon overtook him. First, one of his servants died of a dangerous disease and then his own son succumbed to the same sickness and Rathar himself buried him near Marseilles with great sorrow. So much disaster fell upon the house of Rathar that, as Gregory says, no one thought he would ever live to see his own country again.[27]

One man notable for his wickedness and lack of respect for Saint Martin and for the property of the Church was a certain Pelagius, who had under him all the keepers of the royal horses. He even beat and abused the servants of the church of Saint Martin. He was finally brought to justice through the saint's power when he seized possession of one of the meadows which adjoined

his own property but which belonged to the nuns. It was just the time of year when the fields were reaped and, the moment he touched the harvest with his sickle, he was suddenly stricken with a fever and died on the third day. He had a tomb already prepared for himself in the church of Saint Martin, but the saint was not willing that he should be buried there. Pelagius' people found this tomb mysteriously broken to bits, so they buried him under the porch of the church.[28]

One with whom Gregory of Tours himself had a dispute was Roccolen, whose illness and death is likewise attributed by Gregory to the protecting power of Saint Martin over his people. After the death of Sigibert in 575, the territory in the vicinity of Tours fell under the power of King Chilperic. Roccolen was sent to Tours to capture Guntram Boso, who was accused of the murder of Chilperic's son, Theudebert, and who had sought sanctuary in the church of Saint Martin in that city. Roccolen set up his camp beyond the Loire and sent messengers to Gregory, threatening to lay the whole city of Tours in ashes if Guntram Boso were not surrendered to him. Gregory replied that never from the earliest times had anyone who had sought sanctuary in the Church been handed over to his enemies and if he, Roccolen, should attempt to carry out his threats, both he and King Chilperic would have reason to regret it. He warned Roccolen specifically that the power of the saint was not to be ignored since only the day before it had been shown in a miracle by which cripples had been given the use of their limbs. This threat of Saint Martin's power did not frighten Roccolen, however, who had his men take apart a house belonging to the Church and where he was encamped. They carried off the nails which had held the house together and destroyed crops and other property in the neighborhood. In the midst of these depredations, Roccolen was stricken with jaundice but even this warning of the saint's displeasure was ignored. He renewed his threats to Gregory as to what he would do if Guntram Boso were not handed over to him. The day of Epiphany came around and Roccolen was very much worse. Yielding to the urging of his friends, he crossed over to Tours and joined in the procession, riding on his horse behind the cross and preceded by his banners. As he entered the church of Saint Martin, his feeling of anger and rage against the bishop left him. He was still too ill to eat but even so, he did not immediately give up his impious mission. Finally he made up his mind to proceed to Poitiers where he was to establish new oppression for the citizens of that city but, on the day before these measures were to take effect, Roccolen was smitten by the saint and died.[29]

The downfall and death of Eberulf, whose murder within the precincts of the church of Saint Martin at Tours has been previously discussed, was attributed by Gregory of Tours to the fact that he had always refused to show any reverence for the great saint.[30]

The saints did not always show their power by punishments; they also rewarded the virtuous in various ways and stood ready to lend their aid when called upon in time of emergency. Many stories of people who were sick, blind, and crippled were told in which cures were attributed to the miraculous power of the saints.

One such story related by Gregory of Tours tells how a girl twelve years old, who for six years had been like a dead person, was restored to health during the progress of the celebration of the feast of Saint Martin. She could neither see, speak, hear, nor move. Her parents prayed constantly at the tomb of the saint and also offered gifts and made vows. Finally their efforts were rewarded and the girl was cured by the power of the saint.[31]

When a man named Bildericus, who had lived for many years without having any children, had a son born, this was immediately interpreted as a reward for generosity toward the Church. Bildericus decided to give all of his property to the church of Saint Martin, believing that he would never have any children to inherit it, and kept for himself only enough to live on for the rest of his life. As a reward for this act, through the power of Saint Martin, Bildericus not only had one son born but later he had several others. He did not attempt to take back what he had given to the Church, however, but gave other property to these sons and confirmed his earlier gifts to the saint.[32]

This same miraculous interpretation of events appears in an episode which Gregory tells concerning a fire which threatened the destruction of the city of Paris. In commemoration of an act of Saint Martin, an oratory had been erected at the gate of Paris. When the destruction of the city by fire seemed imminent, the man who had built the oratory took refuge in it with his wife and all his effects, trusting to Saint Martin to keep the fire from destroying it. The people called to the man and his wife, urging them to come out, but they prayed continuously to Saint Martin, never doubting that they would be saved. So potent was the power of the saint that he not only saved the oratory but even preserved the houses which were near it from the flames.[33]

The reality of the existence of this power of the saints in the minds of the people is also seen in the manner in which they sometimes attempted to bargain with them, promising them something in return for benefits asked. One instance of such action concerns an epidemic which attacked horses in the region of Bordeaux. In

the neighborhood was a domain belonging to Saint Martin and which contained an oratory consecrated to him. During the epidemic, the people of the district went to the oratory and vowed to give to the saint the tithe of all the horses which should escape the disease. As a result of this strategy, according to Gregory, the horses which were sick were cured and those which had not been attacked by the disease before that time escaped it altogether. In order definitely to identify their horses as being under the protection of Saint Martin and thus to ward off the disease, the people branded them with the iron key to the door of the oratory.[34]

Another man vowed to consecrate to Saint Martin for the lighting of his basilica all the wax procured from his bees in exchange for the saint's help in getting them back into the hive, from which they had escaped. Needless to say, according to the story, the bees were easily returned to the hive, thanks to the help of the saint.[35]

The bishops were the natural material out of which the saints were made and, consequently, they enjoyed great prestige during their lives on this account, aside from that accorded to them through their high official position. Any misfortune which befell persons who had been guilty of disrespect to a bishop was interpreted as a manifestation of divine power, acting in the bishop's defense. Gregory tells about several instances where such was the case.

Reference has previously been made to the efforts of Nantinus to get possession of property which his uncle, Marachar, had willed to the Church. Heraclius, the bishop of Angoulême, excommunicated Nantinus for having destroyed some of this property in order to prevent the Church from having it, but after the death of Heraclius, Nantinus was restored to communion by other bishops. A few months later, divine anger overtook Nantinus. He was stricken with fever and died, crying aloud that he was being summoned to judgment by Bishop Heraclius whom he had wronged. This fate of Nantinus, Gregory says, should be a warning to all people who do not fear to injure bishops, since any injury done to the servants of the Lord will be quickly avenged.[36]

Another instance cited by Gregory as a warning against showing disrespect to bishops concerns a priest of the city of Rodez. After the death of Bishop Dalmatius of Rodez, Transobad was a persistent candidate to succeed him but, on account of the terms of the bishop's will, his successor was not immediately appointed since a suitable one had not been found. Transobad gave a banquet for all the clergy in the city. During the banquet, one of the priests began to speak abusively of Dalmatius, even calling him crazy and a fool. His punishment was not long delayed. While he was speak-

ing, the cupbearer came to offer him a cup. He took it and was just raising it to his lips when he dropped it and fell over against his neighbor, dead.[37]

Recluses were also supposed to possess this same miraculous power and they were consequently held in great respect. When King Childebert was leaving for Spain in 531, he went to see Eusitius, a recluse, who lived in the region of Bourges and subsequently honored under the name of Saint Ysis in the church of Saint Marcel at Saint Denys in France.[38] The king offered money to Eusitius who refused it, telling him to give it to the poor since he himself had no use for money. He also predicted victory for Childebert who made a vow that, on his return, he would build a basilica at that place in honor of the old man.[39]

The invasion of the Lombards was predicted by Hospicius, a recluse who lived near Nice. He wore iron chains wound about his skin and a hair shirt over them and ate only the simplest kind of food. He said that the Lombards would enter Gaul and destroy seven cities because of the wickedness of the inhabitants. The people no longer paid tithes nor practiced charity toward the poor. The Lombards came as he had predicted and climbed up to the top of his tower where they saw the holy man loaded with his chains and wearing his hair shirt. They thought he must be a criminal who was being punished and when questioned, he told them that he was. Thereupon one of them drew his sword and was about to strike Hospicius over the head but his arm was miraculously stayed and stiffened, so that he could not move it. Badly frightened at this display of miraculous power, the Lombards prayed for mercy and asked Hospicius what they should do to gain his favor. The recluse made the sign of the cross over the arm and it was mysteriously restored as suddenly as it had been afflicted. The Lombard was converted on the spot.[40]

3. *Triumph of the Belief or Practical Results.*

As a result of this great popularity of the saints and the firm belief that was shared by the whole of society in their miraculous power, many violent deeds were averted and the Church was able to make its efforts to protect its property and its dependents much more effective than if the hand of the powerful and the ruthless had not been stayed through fear of divine punishment.

Many stories of how this miraculous power had served this purpose in the past were current in Gregory's time and he himself was able to invoke it to good advantage upon more than one occasion.

One of the legendary stories of the past concerned the time of Clovis, who is represented as having regarded with awe the special protection which the saints were believed to exercise over territory dedicated to them. Reference has already been made to the manner in which Clovis punished the soldier who had taken some hay belonging to a poor man in the territory of Tours, over which Saint Martin exercised special protection. Clovis killed the offending soldier with his sword, saying: "How can we hope for victory, if we offend Saint Martin?" He then sent messengers to the church to seek some sign of the saint's favor. When he reached the neighborhood of Poitiers, Clovis saw a fiery beacon issue from the church of Saint Hilary to guide him and interpreted this as a sign that this saint would aid him in defeating his enemies. Thereupon he warned his army to touch nothing belonging to the inhabitants of that region.[41]

Gregory also tells another story in which fear of retribution by the saint protected property belonging to the basilica of Saint Martin in Galicia, on orders from King Miro, who succeeded his father to the throne in 570. This story is suspiciously similar to the one told about how Clovis punished the soldier for taking some hay belonging to territory protected by Saint Martin, referred to above, and seems to be based on current legend rather than on any actual historical fact, even though Gregory of Tours alleges that the man who told him the story had heard it direct from King Miro himself.

Before the door of the basilica of Saint Martin, there was a vine on which grapes were growing. The king passed by these grapes on his way to pray in the church and cautioned his followers not to touch any of the grapes for fear of arousing the anger of the saint, since everything there was sacred to him. The king's fool (*mimus regis*) decided to ignore the warning and reached up his hand to take some of the grapes. Immediately the arm which he had raised became paralyzed and his hand was stuck fast to the arbor. He cried out in pain and begged those who were with him to implore Saint Martin to have mercy on him. When the king learned what had happened, he was so angry that he would have cut off the man's hands if the others had not prevented him from doing so. Finally feeling pity for the poor man, the king went into the church where he prostrated himself before the altar and prayed for mercy for his servant. The saint was persuaded by the king's prayers and set the man's hand free.[42]

It is an interesting fact that the man who told this story to Gregory was Florentianus, mayor of the household to King Childebert, since it shows how the people of Gregory's time must have spread these miraculous stories about Saint Martin's power, and

also that this firm belief in the power of the saints was not confined to those connected with the Church and told only by them.

Respect for the power of Saint Vincent is credited by Gregory of Tours with having saved the city of Saragossa when it was besieged by the sons of Clovis, Childebert and Chlothar. When the city was surrounded, the inhabitants turned to God for aid. They neither ate nor drank but, putting on hair shirts, they marched around the walls, singing psalms and bearing with them the tunic of Saint Vincent. The women followed them, dressed in black, their hair unbound and ashes on their heads. The besiegers were at a loss to understand what was going on, so they questioned a poor man whom they had taken prisoner. He told them that the citizens were carrying the tunic of Saint Vincent and imploring the Lord to show mercy to them. Reference to the saint filled the Franks with fear, so they abandoned the siege of the city and returned to Gaul, taking their plunder with them.[43]

Belief that a storm had been sent by Saint Martin to lash the armies of Childebert and Theudebert prevented these two kings from attacking the army of their brother, Chlothar, and thus averted a civil war. The storm appeared to come in answer to the prayers of Queen Clothilde who besought the saint to keep her sons from going to war against each other. The queen spent the night in prayer and at dawn a great storm arose and showered the armies of Childebert and Theudebert with large hailstones. Their horses were scattered and their whole army was disorganized. Childebert and Theudebert interpreted the storm as the judgment of God for their having planned to fight their brother and threw themselves on the ground, beseeching pardon for their sins. Not a drop of rain fell on the army of Chlothar. Envoys were sent to Chlothar asking for peace and thus the war was averted. At the close of his account, Gregory of Tours remarks that no one can doubt that here the power of Saint Martin had manifested itself through the intercession of the queen.[44]

It was through fear of this mystical power attributed to Saint Martin that Bishop Injuriosus was able to prevent King Chlothar from taxing the Church at Tours. Mention has previously been made of this attempt of the king. Injuriosus warned him that he would regret it if he persisted in robbing the poor whom he should be feeding and withdrew in anger from the king's presence. King Chlothar was frightened. He knew that Saint Martin would avenge any attempt to take what belonged to the church which was under his protection so he sent after the bishop with gifts, begging for his pardon and also asking that he pray that the saint might look with favor on him.[45]

Upon another occasion, respect for this power resulted in the return of some property to the Church by King Sigibert which had been unjustly seized by Charibert. "One should not keep silent," says Gregory, "about how the saint lends his help wherever he wishes to his servants in protecting his property". King Charibert, who, according to Gregory of Tours, hated clerics, neglected the churches and despised priests, forcibly took possession of a certain domain named Nazelles (Nazelles sur la Cisse, Indre-et-Loire).[46] He sent some officers of his stables, together with a number of horses which were to be maintained on the domain in question. Arriving at the place, the men took some hay which had been piled up and fed it to the horses. As soon as they began to eat it, however, the horses suddenly went mad and, breaking loose, charged across the plain. Some were blinded, others went over precipices, and still others were transfixed on sharp stakes in attempting to penetrate enclosures. The officers of the stables realized that all this was a sign of God's anger and, collecting as many of the horses as they could catch, they went back to the king and advised him to give up his plans of seizing the property. Charibert was filled with rage and shouted that, justly or unjustly, while he was king, the Church should never have that domain. Soon after having made that boast, by divine judgment, Charibert was placed in the tomb. King Sigibert succeeded him and, out of respect for the wishes of the saint, so unmistakably expressed, and at the suggestion of the bishop, he returned ownership of the disputed property to the domain of Saint Martin, where it had remained up to Gregory's day. Gregory closes his account with a warning to those in power to remember that God avenges His servants promptly and adds the remark that if any of them should be moved to anger by the story, it would be a sure sign that it applied to him.[47]

Besides relating episodes which, according to popular belief, had taken place before his own time, Gregory of Tours also includes various stories about his contemporaries.

So strong was the conviction that the saints were omnipresent and prepared to reward or to punish according to the deserts of an individual that whenever some act was contemplated which was known to be wrong, the greatest precautions were taken to propitiate the saints or to protect the individual in some manner from the consequences of his deed. Persons whom Gregory represents as having been notoriously unscrupulous, even in this age of violence, were likely to proceed with caution in such matters.

King Chilperic took all possible precautions to ward off punishment for violating an agreement which he had made with his brothers. Upon the death of Charibert, the remaining three grand-

sons of Clovis, Chilperic, Sigibert and Guntram, made a pact whereby the one who should enter the city of Paris without the consent of the others was to lose his share of the city and, furthermore, should come under a curse. In 583, King Chilperic decided to set forth for Paris but he was fearful of bringing the curse upon himself by so doing. In order to ward off the effects of the curse, he resorted to the mystical power believed to be possessed by relics and had the relics of many saints carried before him as he entered the city, believing that their combined power would furnish him with ample protection.[48]

Another notoriously unscrupulous person who stood in awe of incurring the saints' displeasure was Claudius, who was sent to Tours by King Guntram and Queen Fredegundis to get Eberulf out of the church of Saint Martin, where he had sought sanctuary, and kill him. While on the way to Tours, Claudius began to take notice of omens, "according to the barbarian custom," and to find them unfavorable. Thus the Gallo-Roman Gregory referred to the Franks. At the same time, Claudius made many inquiries in an effort to ascertain whether the power of Saint Martin had shown itself recently against the breakers of oaths and especially whether instant vengeance had been taken upon those injuring people who had put their trust in the saint.[49] His concern regarding punishment for the breakers of oaths was evidently in preparation for his plans to lure Eberulf out of the church, as he had decided to deceive him by false oaths of friendship. The manner in which both Claudius and Eberulf were killed and the violation of the sanctity of the church of Saint Martin was avenged by the poor has already been discussed.[50]

Another episode which illustrates how this attitude toward the power of the saints really operated in determining the actions of the people also illustrates how very real the existence of the saints was to them. Even King Chilperic, whom Gregory pictures as being especially ruthless in his actions and an actual enemy of the Church,[51] did not dare to act deliberately in opposition to the saint's wishes.

In spite of the miraculous way in which Roccolen had been disposed of, Chilperic was still determined to capture Guntram Boso, who was in sanctuary in the church of Saint Martin. Chilperic feared the saint's power too greatly to take Guntram Boso by force so he wrote Saint Martin a letter, requesting that the saint write back to him and tell him whether or not he might have Guntram Boso dragged out of the church which was protecting him. This request, together with a blank piece of paper, was put on Saint Martin's tomb. Baudegisel, who brought it, waited three days but

having gotten no answer from the saint, he went back to report to Chilperic. The king did not dare proceed with his plans for forcibly seizing Guntram Boso but he sent other messengers to exact an oath from him that he would not leave the church without Chilperic's knowledge. Guntram gave the required oath, swearing on the altar-cloth of the church.[52]

Gregory himself had several personal experiences in which the belief in this miraculous power of the saints enabled him to uphold the interests of the Church and of the poor against injustice.

By invoking respect for the power of Saint Martin on the part of a judge, Gregory was able to obtain freedom for a man in whose behalf the saint had acted. The man was innocent of the crime of which he was accused but had been convicted and was being taken to the slaves' prison. He was being led along by his guards, his hands tied securely. When they reached the public square in front of the basilica of Saint Peter, the bonds which were on the prisoner's hands fell off. He reminded his guards that this miracle was proof of his innocence, but they tied him up again more securely than before and prepared to continue on their way. Just at that time Gregory of Tours came along on his way from the basilica of Saint Martin. They drew nearer and suddenly the prisoner caught sight of Saint Martin's church. His hands were again loosed and, jumping down from the horse on which he was riding, he threw himself at Gregory's feet and told him what a great injustice was being done to him. Gregory spoke to the judge about it, doubtless warning him against incurring the anger of Saint Martin after the latter had made his wishes known through the miracle, and the man was set at liberty.[53]

It was upon this belief in this mysterious power that Gregory relied in preserving the exemption of the city of Tours from taxation. For many years, through respect for Saint Martin, the Merovingian kings had left the city free from this burden. In the time of King Childebert this immunity was threatened. Reference has already been made to the new tax lists which were drawn up by this king at the request of the bishop of Poitiers, Maroveus, to relieve the poor of that city from the heavy burden which rested upon them. During this tax revision, the collectors came to Tours, armed with lists of taxpayers which had been made up in the time of former kings. Gregory himself was bishop of Tours at the time and refused to allow the tax to be collected. He made them a long speech in which he reviewed the history of the exemption which the city had enjoyed. In the days of King Chlothar, earlier in the sixth century, tax lists had been drawn up for the city and had been submitted to the king. Chlothar, fearing the power of Saint Martin,

the protector of Tours, had had the books burned. King Charibert, who succeeded Chlothar, had taken an oath to allow the city the same privileges that it had enjoyed under his predecessor. Gaiso, then count of the city, took the lists which had been drawn up under Chlothar and began to collect the tax but, when he was opposed by Bishop Eufronius, he took the lists to Charibert to show them to him. Charibert regretfully, through fear of incurring Saint Martin's displeasure, threw the capitulary into the fire and had the money which had been collected turned over to the Church, declaring that no citizen of Tours should pay any tax to the royal treasury. King Sigibert, to whose share the territory of Tours fell upon the death of Charibert, had never attempted to collect a tax from them and for fourteen years Childebert had done the same. Gregory then warned them that, although he recognized that they held the power either to tax the city or not to tax it, if they went against the oath of the king they would be punished. Upon being confronted with the book containing the lists for the city of Tours, Gregory replied that the book had never come from the royal treasury and had not been valid for years. He presumed it had been produced through the enmity of some malicious person who wished to rob the city. The identity of this person was soon revealed. In the course of the discussion, the son of a man named Audinus was stricken with fever and died. Audinus was the man who had produced the book. Uncertain of what to do next, the royal representatives sent a mission to King Charibert, asking for his decision. Childebert replied, confirming the immunity of the people of Tours, convinced that it would be too dangerous to risk the anger of Saint Martin.[54]

Therefore, from the above references, it is apparent that Merovingian society in general, from the kings on the one hand down to the simple peasants on the other hand, believed firmly that the saints were possessed of miraculous power and that this power was a force to be reckoned with or to be counted on in time of need, as the case might be.

The fear of incurring divine displeasure acted as a sort of conscience, as it were. They were always conscious of an all-seeing eye watching over their acts and from which they could not escape.

II. Saint Martin of Tours

Whereas in the writings of Gregory of Tours, various saints are mentioned and their miracles are related, the outstanding figure is that of Saint Martin of Tours, the great saint of the Merovingians. He has also been called the founder of monastic life in Gaul.[55] Saint Martin died about 397, at the end of the fourth century, and

the various accounts of his life written by Sulpicius Severus, his contemporary, by Paulin of Périgueux in the fifth century and, in the sixth century, by Gregory of Tours as well as by Fortunatus, the Italian poet, bear witness to the great respect in which he was held not only in Gaul but in Italy as well. The extent of the influence exercised by this saint in particular as well as the practical effects of this influence in determining the attitude of Merovingian society toward the poor forms one of the most interesting aspects of Gregory of Tours' work and one which gives particular insight into the psychology of the epoch of which this historian is our chief source of information.

1. *His Great Mystic Power*

Like all other saints, Saint Martin was believed to possess extraordinary supernatural powers and one way in which this power appeared was in the miraculous delivery of prisoners. Paulin of Périgueux relates how Saint Martin succeeded in saving from torture and obtained freedom for a large number of prisoners whom Count Avitianus had brought to Tours to be condemned. In such stories, the traits of character of the persecutors and the methods of torture had become traditional and stereotyped with the hagiographs.[56] In this particular instance, true to type, the judge was an inhuman monster and the methods of torture which were to be employed were the most harrowing, all given in careful and minute detail. The judge arrived in Tours followed by a long line of intended victims, fastened together by great chains which scarred their necks and by heavy irons which thudded and clanked against their bruised limbs, making their progress extremely painful. When Saint Martin, then bishop of Tours, heard about the preparations which were being made to torture these prisoners in his city, he was so grief stricken he could not sleep. At night, unobserved by anyone, he made his way through tortuous and winding streets to the house where Avitianus was staying. Through his miraculous power, he not only escaped observation by man but even the fierce watchdogs were kept silent. The doors of Avitianus' house were closed and locked, but the saint lay down in the dust in the road before his door and besieged heaven with his tears. An angel warned Avitianus in a dream that the servant of God was lying in the dust outside his door. He sent his servants to investigate but, upon being warned a second time by the angel, he himself went to see if it was true. At the sight of Saint Martin's face, upon which were reflected all possible virtues, Avitianus paled and trembled. He knew what had brought the saint to his house and, beseeching him to deliver him from his sin and to forgive him, Avitianus promised to set all the prisoners free.

When he had done so and the poor victims found themselves at liberty, they threw themselves at Saint Martin's feet in gratitude. He, however, told them that it was to God that their thanks should be given since He not only rewards the righteous but also punishes sinners.[57]

The potency of Saint Martin's mystic power was also credited with having saved a man from being attacked by a ferocious dog. The dog, with fangs bared menacingly and uttering horrible noises, was about to spring on the man who, instead of attempting to protect himself with any material weapon, simply pronounced the name "Martin." Immediately a great change came over the animal. His fur, which had been standing on end, settled down, his bloodshot eyes assumed a gentle look, his snarlings turned to friendly sounds and, his tail wagging, he humbly dropped his head.[58]

Apparently the *virtus* of Saint Martin had attained great renown in the fifth century, as Paulin of Périgueux tells about thousands of the afflicted from all over the world coming to his shrine to be healed,[59] about a crowd of people saved from drowning by calling on the name of the saint,[60] and about a house being saved from destruction by fire by virtue of a small piece of candle which had been brought from the tomb of the saint.[61]

Another biographer of Saint Martin was the poet Fortunatus, an Italian by birth and education but contemporary and friend of Gregory of Tours and later, in 598, bishop of Poitiers. Fortunatus' poem was composed at Poitiers about 575, about a century after Paulin of Périgueux had written his account.[62] He adds nothing new in the way of information concerning the life of Saint Martin nor of legends current concerning him and the interest in his account of episodes already related by his predecessors is obscured by his literary efforts. The *jeux d'esprit* in which he indulges have caused him to be severely criticized and accused of superficiality.[63]

His evident preoccupation in producing a literary work has not, however, kept Fortunatus from giving great attention to the miraculous powers believed to have been possessed by the saint. It was this aspect of Saint Martin's life and power which evidently was most important to Fortunatus' countrymen. Gregory of Tours quotes Fortunatus as having told him that it was customary among the Italians, when afflicted with some malady, to hasten to the oratory of the saint and to touch the portion of the body affected with either the curtain at the door, the wall hangings, or anything they could lay their hands on and thus they obtained immediate relief. Fortunatus himself had saved his own father from the pest in this manner.[64]

The manifestation of this miraculous power in Italy also occurred at a château named "Terzio," where an oratory had been dedicated to Saint Martin. Here the interest of the saint in the welfare of his followers was shown by protecting the place from capture by the barbarian invaders. Upon the approach of the enemy, the weapon in the hand of the man on guard, whether it was a lance, a sword, or perhaps just a knife, would gleam brightly for about an hour as though it had been transformed into a candle. Thus warned, the defenders were never caught off their guard by the stealthy approach of the invaders.[65]

A friend and schoolmate of Fortunatus in the school of rhetoric at Ravenna had had his eyesight miraculously preserved by merely touching his eyes with some oil from the lamp which burned before the painted image of Saint Martin.[66]

In addition to all the miracles related to him by Fortunatus, Gregory also says that Fortunatus had told him that the glory of Saint Martin was even more greatly revered in Italy than at Tours itself where the body of the saint was buried. So many miracles had been performed in Italy through the divine power of this saint that they could never be told nor written down.[67]

Gregory of Tours likewise gives great emphasis to this mystic power by virtue of which Saint Martin performed so many miracles. In his account of the life of this saint, it is the miracles and not the events of his life which form the chief topic. After taking cognizance of the accounts of the life of Saint Martin written by Sulpicius Severus and by Paulin of Périgueux, Gregory says that it is his purpose to relate that which was not to be found in the works of his predecessors.[68] Following brief reference to Saint Martin's birth and consecration as bishop of Tours, Gregory tells how the death of the saint was miraculously revealed to Bishop Severinus of Cologne and also to Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan. All of this he disposes of in five short chapters. He then devotes the remainder of the two hundred and seven chapters, of which the work in question consists, to the various miracles performed by the saint after his death.

Gregory explains the lack of detail which sometimes occurs concerning the identity of the persons involved in these miracles by the fact that it often happened that the people went away quickly as soon as they had been relieved of their distress, without being noticed. When the rumor was circulated that the power of the saint had been made manifest, the keepers of the temple were questioned about the circumstances but it was not always possible to learn who the persons involved were. Whenever Gregory himself

managed to see and talk with these people, he recorded their names.[69]

The belief in the miraculous powers attributed in the fifth century to any object connected with Saint Martin's tomb, to which reference has been made above, was even more prominent in the sixth century. In relating the saint's miracles, Gregory of Tours mentions nineteen different occasions where complete cures had been effected by drinking water mixed with some of the dust from the tomb or by touching the diseased person with something from the tomb. In addition, he says that whenever he suffered from headache, from fever, from deafness, from clouding of vision, or when any pain was felt in any of his limbs, he had only to touch the part of his body affected against the tomb of the saint or even with a part of the covering of the tomb and immediately his health was restored and the pain ceased,[70] all by virtue of the strong, mystic power of Saint Martin.

Paulin of Périgueux relates an episode attributed to the life of Saint Martin in which the great supernatural power of the saint plays an important rôle and also in which the conception of the saint as a poor, humble man appears, showing the relation which existed in Paulin's mind between poverty and holiness.

Saint Martin had gone to visit some of his Christian converts in the country districts and was returning in company with some of his friends. He was traveling along the road a little in advance of the rest of his party when he saw, coming toward him at headlong speed, a chariot filled with drunken soldiers, who were shouting, cursing and lashing the mules to urge them to even greater speed. Frightened at the unexpected appearance of the saint, the mules swerved suddenly from their course, hopelessly entangling their harness. The soldiers, furious at the delay, leaped down from the chariot and, seeing in the saint only a poor man who had caused the trouble, they proceeded to beat him cruelly. Saint Martin's face was covered with blood, he drew his breath only with the greatest pain, a black bruise marked his throat, but he made no resistance. He was almost dead when his frightened companions came hurrying up. They placed him on an ass, his customary humble mount, but his body could not hold itself erect. His limbs dangled lifeless. His persecutors were satisfied at having thus relieved their feelings and hastened back to the chariot to resume their journey but, to their amazement, they could not make the mules move from the spot. They beat them with the whip and even with branches of trees, clubs, stones, and anything on which they could lay their hands but the animals seemed turned to stone. Finally, they realized that their failure to move the chariot must be due to some super-

natural power and they inquired who the man was whom they had so cruelly beaten. Upon hearing the name of Martin, they were terrorized. Running after him they fell on their knees, dragging their hair in the dust and their faces bathed with their tears. He freely forgave them and gave them permission to proceed. Suddenly the mules came to life and they could resume their journey.[71]

This episode is a further illustration of the manner in which the mystic power of the saint grew in importance in the minds of the people. In the fourth-century account of the life of Saint Martin, he was apparently beaten with impunity by those who resented his missionary efforts,[72] while in the fifth-century account, such mystical power had come to be associated with his name that those who dared lay hands on the holy man were immediately made the objects of supernatural vengeance. Also, in the account written by Sulpicius Severus, there is no evidence of the name of Saint Martin carrying with it any special powers or significance, although he performed miracles of healing and conversion. In the fifth century, on the other hand, we find the name of the saint striking terror even to the hearts of the drunken soldiers who had beaten him.

2. *Saint Martin, Protector of the Poor*

It is not merely because of the fact that Saint Martin was supposed to be an especially widely revered and powerful saint that he is significant to the present problem of the rehabilitation of the poor. He identified himself as the special protector of the poor and sought a life of poverty; thus through their reverence for him, the Merovingians came to honor what he had honored and to seek what he had sought, poverty. Also, it was this aspect of Saint Martin's life that struck a sympathetic note, which seemed to provide the necessary and appropriate motivation in the minds of Merovingian society and, consequently, was at least partly responsible for the importance which his cult assumed in the lives of the people of that time. It is through this influence which he exercised in behalf of the poor that Saint Martin assumes such prominence in a study of the social psychology of the Merovingian age.

Jesus said: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me,"[73] thus establishing the mystical importance of the poor. This is in germ the idea which we find expressed in the famous story of Saint Martin's cloak which he shared with the poor man at the Amiens gate, and by which act he showed charity and respect for the poor. It is from the story of Saint Martin's life written by Sulpicius Severus, his disciple and contemporary, that we first learn the story of the cloak.

One day, in the middle of an especially severe winter, when many people were dying from the cold, Saint Martin, the soldier, met a poor man naked at the gate of Amiens. The poor man was imploring all those who passed to have pity on him, but no one did. Saint Martin had already distributed everything he had to the poor, even including all of his clothing, with the exception of his cloak and his arms. Nevertheless, without hesitation the saint took his sword, cut his cloak in half and, giving one half to the poor man, covered himself with the other. Some of the people who watched this act of charity laughed at the ridiculous appearance Saint Martin made dressed in only half a cloak but others groaned in sorrow because they, who could have easily given part of their clothing to the poor man without going half naked, had failed to do so. The following night as Saint Martin slept, Christ appeared to him dressed in the half of the cloak which Martin had bestowed upon the poor man. "Look at me Martin", said Christ, "and recognize the garment which you gave away." Then, turning toward the angels who surrounded Him, Christ said to them: "Martin, yet a catechumen, gave me this garment". In thus identifying Himself with the poor man, observes Sulpicius Severus, Christ surely must have remembered His own words when He said: "That which you have done to one of the least of these, you have done unto me." In recognition of this good deed, He had deigned to show Himself with the same cloak which Martin had given to the poor man.[74]

The importance of this cloak of Saint Martin as a relic in Merovingian times was exceedingly great. It was carefully preserved and they even swore on it. The Merovingian kings had it carried before them by clerics when they went into battle, confident in its power to bring them success.[75] The very word *cappella* has come down to us as *chapelle*.

As previously mentioned, an oratory was erected at the gate of Amiens in Saint Martin's honor. This oratory was built in commemoration of this act of the saint and, in Gregory's time, it was served by an order of religious women who lived entirely on charity.[76]

Sulpicius Severus also records another act which apparently made a deep impression upon the minds of the people. Entering Paris one day, Saint Martin met a leper at the gate of the city. He kissed him and blessed him and immediately the leprosy miraculously disappeared and the man was completely healed.[77] This story represents a striking parallel with the Biblical account of the leper who was healed by Christ.[78] In honor of this act of Saint Martin, an oratory was erected at the gate of Paris, referred to above, in which a man and his wife took refuge from the fire.

Paulin of Périgueux, who wrote about 463, adds to the stories of Saint Martin told by Sulpicius Severus several additional anecdotes which allegedly took place during the lifetime of the saint, as well as others which occurred after his death. These additions are not surprising when considered in the light of hagiographic development. As Delehaye remarks, relative to the development of legends in the popular mind, a popular hero tended to become credited with having performed all of the marvelous deeds performed by a number of persons. Instead of several heroes existing side by side, each with his own attributes, in the minds of the people they were successively replaced, the latest and the greatest enjoying the accumulated prestige of his predecessors.[79] Inasmuch as it was from current legends that the hagiographs were forced to draw a large part of the material for the stories they wrote concerning the saints,[80] it was only natural that many deeds that they recorded had been performed only in the popular fancy or by some other individual and also that deeds actually performed should have grown both in magnitude and in their miraculous aspect.

In the case of Paulin of Périgueux, approximately sixty-six years had elapsed between the death of Saint Martin and the time when he wrote his account of the saint's life and in that time popular fancy had not been idle.

One such story in which Saint Martin in person figures is in connection with another poor man toward whom the saint showed charity. This also illustrates the increasing emphasis which was being placed, in the public mind, upon Saint Martin as the protector of the poor, even in the fifth century.

Saint Martin was on his way to the church to conduct the usual services when he came upon a poor man, trembling with cold, his head shaking and his teeth chattering pitifully. He was attempting to warm his hands by blowing upon them but his breath froze. His voice was choked with tears and he sobbed inarticulately, but nevertheless, though his words were not understood, the pain and suffering in his cries expressed clearly his great misery. Saint Martin was especially touched by this spectacle. Seeing the deacon to whom the care of the church treasure was entrusted, Saint Martin ordered him to procure some clothing for the poor man at once and at the expense of the Church. Then, taking it for granted that his orders would be promptly obeyed, he retired to the cell where he was accustomed to wait for the beginning of the service. Into this retreat, where not even the priests dared intrude, the poor man forced his way complaining that his wants were not being taken care of. Without hesitating, Saint Martin took off his own tunic and put it on the poor man, himself having nothing left except his amphibiale.

In this, according to Paulin, Saint Martin surpassed in charity even his own famous act in sharing his cloak with the poor man at the Amiens gate, since this time he gave away not only half a cloak but his whole garment, keeping no part of it for himself. The deacon came to call the bishop, Saint Martin, to celebrate mass but the saint would not come out of his cell, saying that charity would have to come first. So the deacon went out and purchased the cheapest and roughest possible kind of a garment and, bringing it to Saint Martin, threw it in a fit of temper at his feet. With great joy Saint Martin put on this rough garment and, thus dressed, went out to celebrate mass.[81]

The frequency with which these charitable acts of Saint Martin are referred to in various inscriptions of the sixth century is proof of the profound impression they had made on the minds of the people of that period.

Fortunatus composed several inscriptions in celebration of the various events of the life of Saint Martin at the request of Gregory of Tours. Such a one is the following which, it has been suggested, probably was placed on the door of Saint Martin's cell since, like the ancient marbles placed along the roads, it invited the passerby to stop.[82] The inscription is entitled "In the cell of Saint Martin, where he clothed the poor man, requested by Gregory the bishop," and speaks of the occasion where the saint gave his own tunic to the poor man who had followed him into his cell.[83]

Fortunatus wrote another inscription which was destined for the church at Tours, rebuilt by Gregory. Here again reference is made to the giving of the saint's own tunic to the poor man.[84]

The same poet composed seven inscriptions, supposedly destined to be placed below the mural paintings which Gregory of Tours had had done on the walls of the cathedral church or possibly of the basilica of Saint Martin. The identity of the church for which they were destined has been the subject of dispute, but LeBlant believes it to have been the cathedral church.[85] These paintings represented for the benefit of the faithful the most famous miracles accomplished by Saint Martin. Of these seven inscriptions, one refers to the kiss given by the saint to the leper at the gate of Paris,[86] one refers to the act of the saint in cutting his cloak in half in order to share it with the poor man at the gate of Amiens,[87] and one refers to the gift of Saint Martin's tunic to the poor man in the church.[88]

In still another inscription, Fortunatus makes reference to the act of Saint Martin by which he shared his cloak with the poor man at Amiens. This inscription is one of a pair, composed at the request of Gregory of Tours and destined one for the exterior and

one for the interior of the oratory at Artanne. This inscription was to be placed on the interior of the oratory.[89]

III. The Mystic Power of the Poor

Finally we come to the culmination of this movement. In sixth-century Gaul we see the poor sharing in this mystic power which was attributed to the saints and in which the belief exercised such a powerful influence in determining the actions of individuals. Not only had reverence for Saint Martin produced greater consideration for those whom he especially loved and protected but the poor themselves came to be regarded as possessing miraculous powers and were regarded with awe not for Saint Martin's sake but for their own sake. Thus there was formed for them the most powerful source of protection which they could possibly have had in this credulous but violent age. In the writings of Gregory of Tours, particularly in the *Historia Francorum,* we observe concrete examples of the practical effects which this belief in the mystical power of the saints in which the poor had come to share exercised in Merovingian society.

Gregory of Tours repeats a legend, which must have been current in the sixth century, concerning the respect for the poor shown by the wife of Namatius, bishop of Clermont in 462, and which also illustrates this mystical relationship believed to exist between poverty and holiness. She was having a church built in honor of Saint Stephen outside of the city walls and, as it was to be decorated with paintings, she was accustomed to sit inside of the church, holding on her knees the book from which she directed the decoration. One day a poor man came inside of the church to pray and, seeing the woman sitting there, dressed in black, he took her to be a poor woman. Approaching her respectfully, he laid a piece of bread in her lap and went away. The bishop's wife took the bread and thanked him. Far from disdaining the gift of the poor man, she took it home with her and used it to bless her meals with until it was all consumed.[90] Thus she saw in it a gift of special value because it had been given her by one of the poor and, consequently, one which she believed to be endowed with mystical power.

Incidentally, LeBlant calls attention to the great importance of the paintings and mosaics in the ornamentation of churches during the Merovingian period. He refers to "a little known passage" from the works of Paulinus of Nola where the latter speaks of the importance of placing these pictures of sacred scenes under the gaze of the gross and illiterate masses. He also refers to a

passage in the writings of Gregory of Tours which states that, by the aid of these pictures and their legends, a poor Christian slave had learned to read and write.[91] Again, in a letter which Gregory the Great wrote in 599 to Gregorius Sereno, the bishop of Marseilles, we find stress laid upon this importance of pictures as the "books of the illiterate" and their existence in the churches defended on those grounds.[92]

Just as many miracles of healing were attributed to the power of the saints, so also there were various stories told which related how persons were cured of various afflictions while engaged in charitable occupations and in ministering to the poor.

One such account is that concerning the woman named Remigia who recovered the use of her arm while engaged in serving the poor. She was accustomed to distribute food to the poor inscribed on the register of the church of Saint Martin of Tours and who gathered there. One day she was just in the act of handing them wine when she discovered that she was able to stretch out her withered arm and her crippled fingers. After having spent the whole day acting as the servant of the poor, she returned to her home completely cured. Subsequently she furnished to the poor of that church the food which they needed. One time one of her daughters was suddenly attacked by fever. Remigia came as usual to give the food to the poor and spent four days praying and fasting before the cell of Saint Martin, imploring his aid. When her daughter had completely recovered, Remigia returned home, and she and all her people praised the greatness of God.[93]

A similar miracle was accomplished at the cell of Saint Martin for the benefit of Vinastis, who had been blind for years. Vinastis performed the same service for the poor as Remigia, distributing food abundantly to the poor of the place after having performed his religious duties for the night. Although completely blind, he waited on them as a servant. He had performed this service for a number of years when, one evening, having finished his task and said his prayers, he thought he could see a silk curtain which hung from the balustrade around the bed of the saint. He prayed more fervently than ever and, in a dream, a man appeared to him and told him to go to the basilica of Saint Martin and the cure would be completed. He had himself taken there immediately by his servants and, as soon as he had touched the threshold, his sight was fully restored to him.[94]

One of the most practical ways in which the poor in general benefited from this mystical link, which existed in the minds of the society of the time, between them and the power of the saints

was the great impetus given to almsgiving. This was practiced by people of all classes and for various reasons, as will appear.

The mention of the fact that a person had been generous to the poor was one of Gregory's highest terms of praise. He gives this praise to King Guntram who, after the death of King Chilperic, exerted himself to restore to the Church property which had been withheld from it by Chilperic. Among his other acts of generosity and justice, he made large gifts to the poor.[95]

This attribute of generosity in almsgiving was also considered a sign of devotion to holy things in general. Deacon Vulfolaic, upon being urged by Gregory of Tours when the latter visited him at his monastery, told Gregory the story of his life. One of the ways in which his holiness showed itself when he was a child was in the habit which he formed of giving any money which came into his hands as alms to the poor.[96]

The firm belief of the time in the possession of this mystical power by the poor is illustrated in the words of Chrodinus, whose generosity in endowing churches has already been mentioned. He said that he was giving all these things to the Church so that the poor, being relieved of their misery through these gifts, might obtain grace for him from God.[97]

This same idea that almsgiving would provide a source of influence and protection for the donor after death through the power of the poor is reflected in various inscriptions of the time.

An inscription dedicated to Pantagathus, bishop of Vienne, contains an expression of the belief that almsgiving would bring to the donor some reward in the form of benefits after death. Before becoming bishop of Vienne, Pantagathus had possessed a high administrative position,[98] like so many of the bishops in Merovingian times such as Saint Ouen under Dagobert I, Saint Namatius of Vienne, Saint Nicetius, and Saint Bavon. We know that Pantagathus was bishop of Vienne in 538, as he was present at the Third Council of Orléans at that time. The inscription composed in his honor praises him for his generosity toward the poor. He provided feasts and gave great wealth to the poor, "seeking thus to attain heaven".[99]

This same thought that he who devotes himself to good deeds lives forever, so typical of the period, is also found in another inscription. This inscription apparently belongs to the second half of the sixth century, although of unknown locality, and is in praise of a man named Nectarius for having been the consolation of the great misery of the poor.[100]

An inscription of Bordeaux, composed by Fortunatus as an epitaph for Leontius, bishop of Bordeaux, praised the bishop for

having left all of his wealth to the Church, thus handing over to Christ what he had formerly possessed by giving it to the poor.[101]

In still another inscription we find expressed the thought that riches used in good works will lay up a treasure in heaven for the devout who thus employ their wealth. This inscription was composed by Fortunatus for a foundation of Bishop Leontius II, which it places under the protection of Saint Martin and refers to the saint's act of kissing the leper and thus healing him.[102]

The same Christian belief that the good one does in life with one's wealth will provide a treasure in heaven is expressed in another epitaph composed by Fortunatus for a man named Aracharius. Neither the identity of Aracharius nor the location of his tomb is known. The epitaph states that Aracharius had returned to the world everything that he had received from it and had carried with him only his good deeds.[103]

Both the locality and the identity of another person, Atticus, for whom Fortunatus wrote an epitaph, are unknown, according to LeBlant, who finds in the lines an indication that the defunct had possessed judicial power.[104] Atticus is praised for having been satisfied with his own possessions and not robbing other people, and also for generosity toward the poor, which would provide for him a treasure in heaven.[104]

Fortunatus likewise praises a man named Basilius in an epitaph, the locality of which is not known. Like Atticus mentioned above, Basilius was content with his own riches and did not seek to get what belonged to others. He gave liberally to churches and also to the poor and so ascended to heaven a rich man.[105]

A man named Julian, whose epitaph was likewise written by Fortunatus, had consecrated his wealth to alleviating the miseries of those living in exile and also the suffering of the poor, in whom he saw represented Christ himself.[106]

The idea that anything given to the poor will serve to obtain a reward for the donor also appears in a poem which Fortunatus addressed to Count Sigoaldus, "who fed the poor for the king". Fortunatus cites Sigoaldus' great love for the poor and says that while the poor man is eating the food given by the charitable, the wealth of the rich increases.[107]

In the face of great public emergency, the Merovingians resorted to almsgiving, believing that in this way they would be able to assuage divine wrath and thus avert further calamity. King Guntram resorted to this means of combatting a plague which raged at Marseilles. The disease threatened to spread, so the most extreme measures were resorted to. The king ordered everyone to gather in the church, to celebrate rogations and to take no nourish-

ment except bread and water. His orders were carried out and, in addition, for three days he distributed alms more generously than ever. His concern for his people seemed so great that he might have been a bishop instead of a king, as Gregory remarks.[108]

The potency of almsgiving as a means of stopping a plague was again shown during an epidemic which attacked the territory of Tours and Nantes in 591. Gregory says that they held rogations, fasted and gave alms to the needy, and thus divine anger was stayed.[109]

The general prestige which the poor enjoyed through their poverty is evidenced in the way Fredegundis laid her plans for the murder of her rival and enemy, Queen Brunhildis. She had her would-be assassins disguised as beggars and instructed them to approach Brunhildis as if asking alms, using their chance of being close to her to stab her.[110] Fredegundis knew that beggars would be allowed to approach Brunhildis.

The power and influence which this belief exercised on even the most unscrupulous of the Merovingians is shown in the fact that in their greatest personal emergency, the illness of their children, even Chilperic and Fredegundis resorted to almsgiving in a last desperate effort to save their children's lives. Although standing in history as one of the world's most fiendish and inhuman of women, even Fredegundis' severest critics admit that she had one human and vulnerable side, her great love for her children. Personal and public disaster was often interpreted as the sign of divine anger and the result of oppressing the poor or neglecting to distribute alms. Consequently this was the manner in which Fredegundis interpreted the illness of her children.

King Chilperic, her husband, fell sick first and no sooner had he recovered than their younger son, who had not yet been baptized, was stricken with the same disease. They had him baptized promptly, and he seemed to grow a little better. Next his brother Chlodobert was attacked by the disease. Seeing her children threatened with death, Fredegundis repented of all her misdeeds and, going to the king, she begged him to join her in making her peace with the divine powers before it was too late. She reminded him how often they had been seized with fever as a warning to mend their ways, but these warnings they had disregarded. Now the tears of the poor whom they had oppressed, the cries of the widows and of the orphans were killing their children. Sending for the books containing the tax lists for her own cities, she threw them into the fire and urged Chilperic to do likewise with all other tax lists which had been made up since the days of King Chlothar. Chilperic joined in with Fredegundis in this tardy repentance and

not only burned the tax lists but he also sent out messengers to forbid the assessments of any more taxes. In spite of these extreme measures however, they were unable to save the young princes, for they both died. The thoroughness with which they had been chastened appeared in this last calamity. Fredegundis and Chilperic did not rebel against divine judgment but showed their submission by distributing alms more generously than ever, both to the churches and to the poor.[111]

Once again Fredegundis resorted to almsgiving and repentance when another son, Chlothar, was very ill. This was after the death of King Chilperic. The child was so nearly dead that his death was announced to King Guntram who started out for Paris but, hearing that his nephew had recovered, the king did not proceed beyond Sens. Fredegundis vowed a large sum of money to the church of Saint Martin and also sent messengers to Waroch, telling him, for the sake of her son's life, to set free all the prisoners which he had taken from Guntram's expedition into Brittany.[112]

Hence the poor had attained real prestige and this agency of protection, although existing only in the minds of the people and purely an intangible one, was able to accomplish more in their behalf than all legal and ecclesiastical power combined.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the general term "poor" is used recurrently in the various texts to which reference has been made, it is now possible, in view of the foregoing material, to designate more definitely just who comprised this class in Merovingian society.

First of all, there were the *matricularii* or those whose names were inscribed on the church registers and who lived exclusively on alms. Some of these were voluntary poor, the "poor of Christ", as Saint Cesarius of Arles referred to them, while others were merely indigent people who had succeeded in getting their names on these rolls, thereby perpetually solving their problem of livelihood. The *matricularii* were authorized to beg alms at the church door. Incidentally, the term *matricularii* has evolved into the modern French word *marguilliers* or *vestrymen,* a notable increase in the importance of the ones so designated.

In addition to these, there were innumerable other beggars who took their place in the atrium of the church or just outside of the church building. Many of these were crippled, blind, paralyzed or diseased and sought in various ways to attract the attention and sympathy of the devout. LeBlant describes, with not too much sympathy, this crowd of beggars which gathered around the tombs of the saints: "l'immense légion des misérables, les fiévreux, les aveugles, les paralytiques, les boiteux, les fous et les épileptiques, si nombreux alors que, laissés libres et errants, ils communiquaient leur mal par la vue même de ses attaques. Ils étaient là, s'agitant furieux dans les sanctuaires, hurlant auprès des tombes comme des bêtes fauves; là sous l'étreinte des crises se produisaient des mouvements désordonnés, des rotations de la tête, cette effrayante contraction du corps se raidissant en arc pour rebondir comme un ressort d'acier."[1]

In addition to begging at the church and in the vicinity of the various basilicas and shrines, there was another form of legitimate begging. Persons whom the bishop considered worthy of special dispensation were granted letters of recommendation, which identified them as authorized by the bishop of a certain district to collect alms and distinguished them from impostors, of which there were naturally a great many. In some cases persons in emergencies were given these letters, such as those for whom Sidonius asked special consideration from his brother bishops.

Not all of those included in the "poor" were beggars, however. The Church also included in its category of special protégés the small proprietors in the country districts and in the little com-

munities who were continually exposed to the depredations of the rich and to plundering on the part of the Merovingian armies. This class of "poor" possessed a certain amount of property and, in the *Letters* of Sidonius Apollinaris, as noted above, we find reference made to a poor man who even owned slaves.[2] We have seen how the rich sometimes turned their horses out to graze on the crops of these people and commandeered their hay and other supplies with ruthless disregard for their rights. Their lack of strong and effective civil protection caused them to turn to the bishops and to the authority of the Church at such times, since there was no one else willing and able to defend them.

Another class of people belonging to the large group termed the "poor" were the slaves. Although the Church itself owned slaves and carefully guarded them as comprising a part of its possessions and therefore part of the property of the poor in general, it strove constantly to ameliorate their condition as a class and also to encourage their enfranchisement on the part of individuals. As we have noted previously, a large number of the Church's canons were directed toward this end. There were many persons such as Duke Rauching who cruelly tortured their slaves and even murdered them at will in defiance of laws against taking their lives without the permission of a judge. To these slaves the Church extended the right of sanctuary and sought to secure their safety by exacting promises of good treatment from the masters before surrendering them. In the case of the slaves whom Duke Rauching buried alive, we have a concrete example of the constant vigilance of the clergy over this class of their dependents.

The liberty of freedmen and of their children was guaranteed and supervised by the Church.

The greatest gift of Christianity to slaves was its doctrine that slaves possessed souls and, hence, were susceptible to the rewards promised to all its followers. This moral emancipation of the slave and the recognition of him as a human being and not merely a chattel was an important step toward the abolition of the institution of slavery and was more important in the early centuries of Christianity than any proclamation of their actual freedom on the part of the Church would have been.

Prisoners of all sorts, civil as well as captives of war, also formed an important part of the group of "poor" to whom the Church extended special protection, and the hagiographic literature abounds with marvelous stories of their deliverance. As we have seen in the case of the various accounts of the life of Saint Martin, these stories became more marvelous as time went on. It often happened that letters of recommendation were likewise granted to

prisoners, and the canons demanded that when such was the case, the bishop granting the letter should state clearly the amount which the particular individual needed in order to ransom himself.

Lepers were also included in the "poor" of the Church, the bishops being especially exhorted to see to it that these people were provided with food and clothing and were not permitted to beg outside of their own district.

In brief, all those who did not belong to the class of the "rich", in Merovingian times, belonged to the "poor". As we have noted, members of the latter class sometimes succeeded in rising to membership in the former.

Besides the development of an elaborate system of protection of these people of the lower class, in the sixth century there grew up a great respect for the state of poverty. One evidence of this is to be found in the "voluntary poor" mentioned above, or persons who had voluntarily abandoned all of their possessions and assumed a state of complete poverty, depending upon alms for their existence. The results of the examination of this attitude, which reached its high point in the sixth century in France and which has been the purpose of this study, may be summed up briefly as follows.

Upon respect for poverty the whole system of protection which the Church had built up for the poor as a class depended for its effectiveness. But to what did this respect for poverty owe its origin and upon what was it based? Indirectly to the fundamental ideals of Christianity and directly to that vital force which governed and controlled all classes of Merovingian society, even to the small details of their daily lives, the cult of the saints.

Unable to conceive of an abstract deity, the Merovingians eagerly seized on the idea of the saints, who had been men and women like themselves, as intermediaries between them and the Deity and who would intercede in their behalf if they could manage to obtain the saints' favor. These latter were also believed to be constantly watching over the people, ready to repress their evil deeds and to bring swift punishment. One way in which their favor could be obtained was by showing honor to their relics and by respect for property belonging to the oratories and churches dedicated to them. This meant endowing them with property and contributing to their wealth whenever possible. Dust from the saints' tombs was mixed with water and drunk as medicine and small pieces of fringe or any fragments taken from a sacred place were credited with great healing power. Persons went to great trouble to obtain the bone of a finger or any small part of a saint's body as a relic to be kept in their house. Those who could afford

to have a specially constructed tomb in preparation for death strove to have this tomb located in a church, as near to the tomb of a saint as possible, in order that the latter might precede him on Judgment Day and intercede for him.

In the sixth-century conception of Saint Martin, we see epitomized not only this great reverence for the saints and the extensive influence of the cult but we see also the mirror of the aspirations and ideals of the age. What they needed to satisfy the natural craving for a sympathetic force, they found in him. In the general breaking up and disintegration of all existing institutions brought about by the fall of the Roman imperial system and the barbarian invasions, religion was the only social force that remained. Nothing else was stable in this transitional age. There was nothing else to which the great mass of the population could turn for help. It was to their bishops that the people applied for advice and leadership, and it was around these central figures that the new society revolved and was organized. They seized eagerly on Saint Martin as having been one who had understood the misery of the poor and the oppressed and who had recognized in them the existence of Christ himself, as taught by the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. The stories concerning Saint Martin's life fell on fertile ground in sixth-century France where, because of the general misery and suffering, it was not the idea of the saint as an especially powerful worker of miracles that fascinated their imaginations, as it was in Italy, but it was the idea that here was one who had shown special favor to the poor. Therefore, they adopted Saint Martin, who had been bishop of Tours, as their special saint and, in the natural process of hagiographic development, this aspect of his life, his interest in the poor, increased in importance as time went on. To find favor with him, they strove to do as he had done and to honor those whom he had honored. To do this, they gave alms generously. Among the various episodes of this saint's life, the one which made the greatest impression on his sixth-century admirers was the story of how he had cut his cloak in half and shared it with a poor man who later revealed himself as Christ. In the fifth-century account of his life, as an example of the hagiographic development mentioned above, we find him giving his whole garment to another poor man in the church, himself joyfully donning a cheap, rough garment in which to conduct mass. Not only had Saint Martin shown charity toward the poor but he had sought a life of poverty for himself. He was ugly, unkempt in appearance, and preferred to live in a cell outside of the city of Tours, rather than live in the comfort to which a bishop was entitled and which his brother bishops enjoyed in the fourth century. Hence, Saint

Martin appeared as the ideal expression of the spirit of Christianity, the personification as it were, in the form which most nearly answered the needs of the existing conditions of the time.

This movement ultimately evolved into its final and most complete form. The mystic power, which was believed to be possessed by the saints, was also believed to be possessed by the poor themselves. The wife of the bishop of Vienne even used a piece of bread given by a poor man to bless her meals, believing it to be something sacred. Almsgiving was resorted to in the face of any emergency. They gave alms now "for the good of their soul", as the inscriptions attest, since the poor as well as the saints could intercede for them with God and would one day sit in judgment upon them.

The final expression of this attitude and the profoundness of this belief appear in Fredegundis' submission to the mystical power which brought about her children's death because of her oppression of the poor. After the children were dead, when there was nothing more to be gained, even she bowed before this mysterious power and continued her distribution of alms more generously than ever.

It was through the belief in this mystic power that respect for the poor came to operate as a real social force in civil society and to exert a controlling influence in determining human action. Furthermore, to its patronage of the poor the Church in Merovingian Gaul owed not only its extensive influence in temporal affairs but even its very life. Just as the poor had no protector to take up their cause except the Church, the Church could have found no other group in need of its care, capable of being welded into a useful and effective weapon in its struggle for power and wealth against members of the ruling class, who recognized in its growing possessions a threat to their own security. By making the care of the poor, together with the preaching of its doctrines, the basis of its activity, due to the firm belief in the mystic power possessed by its protégés, the poor, the Church was able to advance rapidly in wealth, in the number of its adherents, and in temporal power as well.

Naturally, a situation that was brought about by the existence of certain conditions would not outlast the need which had called it into life. Therefore, as conditions in France became more stabilized and other forces were more firmly established, this importance of the poor and even of the saints themselves faded into the background. Feudalism, for example, became established as a strong social force and, with the transfer of interests and loyalties, the poor again receded into obscurity. Even the bishops gave

more and more attention to worldly affairs, and the great spiritual renaissance which characterized sixth-century France again subsided. Nevertheless, there were some who still took cognizance of the poor. Peter the Hermit, for example, who preached the First Crusade, preached to the poor. As proven in various studies which have been made on the question of the place of the poor in the society represented by the epic and courtly literature of the Middle Ages, we find the poor man replaced by the *vilain,* an object of hatred and loathing. Only in the Roman de Renard, in the bourgeois literature, and in the *fabliaux* does the lower class come into its own at this period.

A further development and later manifestation of the aristocratic and anti-religious spirit appears in Voltaire's description of the poor. In the sixth century, we find Gregory of Tours seeing in the crowds of poor, who gathered around the tombs of the saints in the churches, persons worthy of sympathy and respect, material on which the saint's power was to operate.[3] In the various lives of the saints, we see these latter lovingly washing them with their own hands, applying healing unguents to their sores and caring for their wants. In contrast with this sixth-century sympathy, in Voltaire's description of a similar crowd, we feel the spirit of recoil, as it were, as from something disgusting and unclean, almost as from an inferior form of life.[4]

The sixth century in Gaul stands out prëeminently, not only as a period of great spiritual renaissance in general, but also as one in which respect for poverty and for the poor, in whom Christ himself stood personified, operated as a strong social force and was the moving spirit of the age.

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    It is interesting to note that the grave of such an important personage as one of Sidonius' ancestors should be unmarked. In order to prevent the recurrence of such a desecration, Sidonius left money to provide for the mound to be built up and marked with polished marble, for which he also composed verses. (*Loc. cit.*)
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77. Sulpicius Severus, *Op. cit.*, XVIII.
78. Matthew VIII, 2-4.
79. Delehaye, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
81. Paulinus, *Op. cit.*, Lib. IV., lines 52, 53.
82. LeBlant, *Op. cit.*, Tome I, p. 225.
83. *Ibid.*, #165.
84. *Ibid.*, #185.
85. *Ibid.*, Tome I, pp. 250-251.
86. *Ibid.*, #186.
87. *Ibid.*, #187.
88. *Ibid.*, #188.
89. *Ibid.*, #196.
90. Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, II-17.
91. LeBlant, *Op. cit.*, Tome I, Note 2 on p. 250.
92. Gregorii I. Papae Registrum Epistolarum, p. 195, IX. 208.
93. Gregory of Tours, *De Virtutibus Sancti Martini*, II, 22.
94. *Ibid.*, II, 23.
95. *Idem., Historia Francorum*, VII-7.
96. *Ibid.*, VIII-15.
97. *Ibid.*, VI-20.
98. LeBlant, *Op. cit.*, Tome II, p. 103.
99. *Ibid.*, #429.
100. *Ibid.*, #647.
101. *Ibid.*, #585.
102. *Ibid.*, #587.
103. *Ibid.*, #633.
104. *Ibid.*, Tome II, p. 508. Also, #635.
105. *Ibid.*, #637.
106. *Ibid.*, #645.
107. Fortunatus, *Opera Poetica*, Lib. X, #17.
108. Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*, IX-21.
109. *Ibid.*, X-30.
110. *Ibid.*, VIII-29.
111. *Ibid.*, V-35.
112. *Ibid.*, X-11.

CONCLUSIONS

1. LeBlant, *Les sarcophages chrétiennes de la Gaule*, p. xv., quoted by Prou. *Op. cit.*, p. 196.
2. See Note 34 on page 19.
3. Gregory of Tours, *De Virtutibus Sancti Martini*, Liber I, Prologus.
4. Voltaire, *Le monde comme il va*, p. 4.

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